

JOHN MARTIN
OF
MARTIN'S CORNER
BY
ADELBERT CLARK

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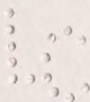
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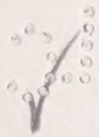
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John Martin
of
Martin's Corner

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I

THE DREAMER

THE sun was sinking behind the hills leaving a trail of crimson along the west, and overhead, the sky was a sea of gleaming gold. It was June, and a light breeze blowing from the meadows bore on its wings the sweetness of growing things deliciously to John Martin as he stood at the garden-gate where he had stood a thousand times before. He was nearing fifty, though the years had been kind & kept him young. Tall, handsome, well built, he had never married, but lived alone with a handsome youth he had rescued from the clutches of the

world when a little lad of ten.

Behind him the old house where he was born caught the ruddy glory of the west upon its ivy-draped windows until they glittered like rubies. Within its weatherbeaten walls, his father had first seen the light of day, had grown to sturdy manhood & had brought home a bride, John's mother; beneath its sloping eaves her gentle spirit had passed out, and a few years later his father had joined her. John hoped also to spend his remaining years in the old home where every ancient beam and time-stained clapboard, every creaking stair and rusty hinge was eloquent of tender memories.

I don't think anyone really knew John Martin, though many

thought they did, simply because he had been born and lived most of his life among them, and in a small country town like the Corners, everybody knows everybody else and what everybody does not know, is not considered worth knowing.

John Martin had lived at the Corners all his life with the exception of two years he had spent in Pennsylvania when a young man. Though his house was old and weatherbeaten, it was known and pointed out to everyone far and near, for John Martin was a lover of flowers and his garden was the most beautiful and luxuriant anywhere for many miles around. Rambling roses of every description, shade and color grew

there in profusion with hollyhocks & dahlias in their seasons. Sweet peas and lavender and mignonette and marigolds and asters crowded every inch of space, and morning-glories and woodbine clambered to the eaves and reached out their tendrils like groping fingers to every gentle breeze that blew. Birds sang all day in the orchard, and in the midst of it all, day in & day out, John Martin moved in a dream. He was kind, always courteous to friend or stranger, but there was ever a reserve in his manner, a shadow of mystery brooding in his eyes, a guarded habit of speech that roused their curiosity and kept them guessing. Some thought one thing, some hinted at another, but none

really knew. What could trouble such a man as John Martin, was the question asked over and over by the gossips. He had no one but himself to care for, save his ward Loran, who was now a man grown & able to carve his own fortune. Why should John Martin have spent all his days in single blessedness? Perhaps it was his peculiarity—his hobby, for every man has his hobby, but why this melancholy air, this dreaming attitude. People remembered he had not always been so, but only since his return from Pennsylvania. Thus they questioned and wondered and never got any nearer the truth, for he was silent.

John Martin was a man with a broad mind, cultivated from

close study of the great lessons of life, though he had never mingled with the world religiously or politically, but had calmly and quietly followed his chosen path. His few friends loved him because they couldn't help it, and to Loran, his ward, he was a god. The young man clung to him as a child clings to its mother, and indeed he had been father and mother to the the little waif.

The elderly ladies at the Corners felt it to be a distinct affront to their sex that he had never married—especially those with marriageable daughters. Never a sewing-circle met or a church fair planned but John Martin the dreamer became the subject of many wagging ton-

gues. His peaceful and secluded existence provoked criticism; some thought him a "slacker" inclined to shirk life's battles when he should have met them like a soldier and learned from experience that we all grow through bearing burdens. All agreed that he was "queer" perhaps a little "touched" in the head, but still John Martin lived on in his own chosen way. Often he was questioned by some of his friends—not his associates, for he had none; but he always put them off with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders, and if he was questioned in regard to Loran, he would say, "Loran must speak for himself." But Loran would not speak; he too, had learned how to remain silent like his

Uncle John as he had chosen to call John Martin. But on this particular evening when I have made my readers acquainted with him, John Martin seemed to be in a far more melancholy mood than he had ever been before. Perhaps the consciousness that he was growing old had been suddenly borne upon him and set him wondering what the end would be and what would become of his boy, who was the core of his heart. Who could tell what was passing through the dreamer's mind that day?

The sunset was slowly fading from the sky and the soft purple veil of night was settling over the green and fragrant meadows that stretched for miles before his eyes until they melted in the

glory and grandeur of the amethystine hills beyond. The birds were still singing their happy songs in the orchard at the back of the house, and a faint smile stirred his well-cut lips as he listened, one hand resting on the gate and his rapt face turned to the west. Far away beyond those everlasting hills, clothed in the solemn beauty of the fast approaching night, John Martin saw a vision of another vine-clad cottage and a sweet face touched with glory of another eventide.

He was so absorbed in his dreaming that he did not notice Loran as he entered the gate & looked tenderly at him with a half-whispered, "dear Uncle John." He had seen John Martin

so often in that mood, he had learned not to disturb or wake him from what perhaps was a happy dream, though to Loran it was like a dagger thrust into his own heart to see him so and not to be able to comfort him or share his secret sorrow.

The boy walked slowly to the house & seated himself on the steps, & he too, began to dream, though his were the bright and happy dreams of youth.

An hour passed and still John Martin stood there. The stars came out & the perfume wafted from the meadows grew heavy with the falling dew; nature was taking its rest. The birds had ceased to sing, save now and then, when one would twitter softly to its mate. The lilacs by

the gate nodded restlessly as if they were trying to touch the dreamer's face with their cool green branches that had already begun to gather the moisture from the falling night. A cricket under the gate began to sing, and another and still another in the tangle of vines along the garden-wall took up the refrain.

A stranger, a wanderer in the night, approaching the place, saw the tall form by the gate, and drew near. John Martin did not see the stranger, yet was conscious of a presence near him.

“Beg pardon, sir, for interrupting you, but could you inform me if there is such a man, a lawyer, in this ere town by the poetic name of Oakley Esden?”

“There is,” replied Martin laconically,

“And does he live near here?”

“He lives about a mile farther up the road.” He did not so much as look at the pilgrim.

“How long has he lived here?”

“All his life.”

“And you—”

“The same.”

“And Mrs Bartlett.”

“She lives on the hill.”

“Where ”

“In the old house known as the “singing-bottle.”

“Haunted?”

“I presume so.”

The stranger was anxious to enter into conversation, but Martin was not in the mood to talk on this particular evening. His heart & mind was far away.

But the stranger was persistent and provoking.

“Could I have a drink of water?”

“Yes, you will find the well at the back of the house.”

He entered the gate & Loran went to the well and drew the water for him, waiting while he drank, eying the young man closely.

“Do you live here at the Corners?”

“Yes sir, I live here with Uncle—” replied Loran, checking himself as he realized he was talking to a stranger.

“O yes,—by the way, what did your uncle say his name was? My memory aint very good.”

“I don’t know.”

“Don't know!”

“No sir, I didn't hear him tell you.”

The stranger muttered angrily as he returned to the gate and tried once more to draw Martin into conversation.

“Thank you, sir.”

“You are quite welcome.”

“A fine evening.”

“Yes.”

“Have a smoke,” said the stranger taking a couple of cigars from his pocket.

“No, thanks,” replied Martin.

The stranger lit one of the cigars, but not for a moment did he take his eyes from John Martin. He tried once more to get him interested, but met with a sad failure, and so walked up the dusty road, looking back

over his shoulder as he went.

When he had gone a dozen yards he stopped, turned squarely around and stood watching the man at the gate, now barely visible in the gathering gloom.

“Well, I’ll be damned!”

II

THE STRANGER

IT was late in the evening when the stranger reached the office of the village attorney and found the place closed. He was about to profane the peaceful eventide with curses at his ill luck, when Oakley Esden confronted him.

“Good evening, did you wish to see me?”

The stranger turned with a look of surprise.

“Good evening, sir—Well, well, if it 'aint lawyer Esden, himself!”

The two men shook hands warmly and Esden peeped inquiringly over his steel-bowed glasses at the stranger.

“Let me see—” he began slowly, looking the man before him over, from head to foot with a judicial air.

But the stranger was too spry and launched a question ahead of him.

“Oakley Esden, twenty years have not changed you very much,” he interrupted. “Your hair is white to be sure, and your step is not so firm, but your features are fair & your physique is well preserved. God has certainly been good to you.”

“Yes,” said Esden, “but who are you?” He was now deeply interested in the stranger and stared at him closely as they stood together in the shade of the great tree in front of his office. “Who are you, that you

remember me after twenty years?"

The stranger did not seem to hear as he went on with his remarks about Esden.

"To most of us the years do wonders. We are changed nightly. But you, Esden, you have been spared by the hand of Father Time, & you still retain the elasticity of a youth at twenty. Ha, ha."

The old lawyer was getting fidgety & it pleased the stranger to see him hopping about.

"But you have not told me your name, persisted the anxious lawyer who had not removed his eyes from the face of the stranger, for even a moment.

"By-the-way, Esden, as I came up the road, I passed an

old house in a garden of old-fashioned flowers. It was a divine spot. Something like Paradise must be made, I am thinking. There was a man standing at the gate & looking across the meadow and he must have been in a trance for he did not notice me at all as I came up and yet, he spoke to me. There was something familiar in his voice. Something that reminded me of other days. I tried to see his face but he would not let me."

"Huh, John Martin," grudgingly replied Esden, provoked that he could not get a word from his strange visitor, as to his identity.

"John Martin?"

"Yes. do you know him?"

“I have heard of him.”

“He and his adopted son Loran live there.”

Esden failed to see the sudden start and the strange look of the stranger as the name of John Martin was mentioned, and the stranger was thankful if ever he was in his life, for the dusky veil of the night. But he quickly recovered his pose and played his part well.

“Oakley Esden must never know who I am. I thought John Martin was dead! Surely it was his name that I saw in the paper. It must be there were two John Martins living here, or perhaps the reporter got mixed in his screed. But this boy Loran; I can't understand who he, is! I wonder if John saw me

coming up the road? If he did and recognized me, that would explain why he kept his face turned away. Oh, no, no, that would be impossible. He could not have recognized me!" he thought to himself.

All this passed through his mind in an instant.

"Sit down here on the steps, stranger, and I will tell you about this man John Martin, for he is a strange mortal, there's no getting around that," said Esden as he seated himself on the steps & indicated the place for the stranger.

"Did you come from far?" again cross-questioned Esden in another effort to learn the name of his visitor; the man again ignored the question.

“Has this man Martin always lived here at the Corners?”

Esden saw that it was useless to question him, so he began with his story, muttering under his breath as he did so: “Never mind, I will get you yet!”

“Well yes and no. It is a rather long story, and perhaps you had better wait until morning when you can come over & I will tell you all I know about it.”

“O, go on with your story. It is not late and I am getting interested,” laughed the stranger leaning back against the closed office door, so that his face was in a shadow.

“So am I,” returned Esden chuckling to himself. “You have not stated your business, yet!”

“O shucks, my business can wait. I am more interested in this man Martin, now.”

“All right,” said Esden, “I’ll be as brief as possible, but there are so many outs and ins to these personal stories, that it is rather hard to cut them short, for when you try, you usually have to start over again, or you will get mixed in the details and leave out something that ought to be in, but I’ll try and tell it as best I can. My memory is not as good as it was twenty years ago. No sir, it isn’t that’s certain,” and he chuckled as if at a good joke.

“Well, sir, from childhood, John Martin was an odd child. His folks were a very pious, devout, sort of people, and were

very careful with whom their little boy played. He was their only child and this may have been the cause of their strictness, and I firmly believe no one should try to bring up a child alone. If you are going to have any, it is better to have two, at least. Well, as I was saying, John was brought up alone, and he only had but one companion in his boyhood, and strange as it may seem, this boyhood friend was an orphan from the Orphans' Home! Is not that enough to make you split your sides? Not that a boy from the Home is not good enough for other boys to play with, but you would think that folks as pious and proud as John Martin's folks were, would not let their son

even look at such a child! But they did, it seems. This orphan was George Castle by name and he and John were of an age, and wherever you would find one, you would find the other. This young George Castle had been adopted by a man by the name of Frank Greenfield who lived in the big brick house up the road here at the Corners. He was a pretty boy, a manly little fellow and everyone seemed to think he was just right and couldn't be tempted. There are folks that think about that way, and that shows just what sort of stuff their brains are made of. There is not a boy or girl, man or woman on the face of God's footstool that can be kept or shielded from temptation! You

may keep them hidden away from other children and carefully packed in velvet lined boxes at nights and never allow them to know what a pack of cards looks like, and you may tell them all you want to about hell-fire & brimstone, but when you have done all this and they have reached the age where they are their own boss, they will not rest until they find out what the aforesaid hell-fire and brimstone is like for themselves. They want to taste the brimstone. I've watched this sort of thing for more than sixty years, and I tell you the carefully reared children on the average are worse than—hell! You've got to give a child a little lee-way, and not for a moment teach it to think

that it is so much better than others, and you can't fill up a child's mind with the fear of a devil and hell-fire and hope to always keep the child in that mood, for the day is coming when the child will know better! Why, when I was a boy, all you could hear in the churches were awful sermons promising hell-fire and brimstone, but I notice you don't hear it now. How do you account for that? If such things were true once, why are they not true now? Does Time and Change make any difference in this written Word of God that has been handed down to us through the ages? If it does, what can we gain or expect to profit by its teachings?

“I guess you’ll have to put a check-rein on me if you want to get at the bottom of John Martin’s story. Well, as I was saying, these two boys grew up like a pair of colts, and between you and I, the very devil was in them both. They were a sly pair of kids—most everybody thought them angels, but they were not, by any means, and when they reached the age of eighteen, believe me, they were “some” boys. The first the folks at the Corners knew, they had packed their duds & started off for Pennsylvania and were away a little more than a year; yes, it might have been two years, when Frank Greenfield, George’s foster father received a letter from him saying he was

going farther south, but he did not mention John's name. About a month later, John Martin returned to the home of his parents, a changed lad, I can tell you. It did something for him to get out away from home and learn to paddle his own canoe! Is it not the making of every lad? Of course it is. They have got to learn life from experience. They have got to know both sides of the human race to profit by their knowledge. You take a boy that's a "democrat" because his father is a "democrat" or a "republican" because his father is a "republican" or a "prohibition" because his father stands for a dry state and what is he good for? I am not discussing any

one of these political parties, for I presume any one of them is good enough in themselves, but what I am driving at, is that a boy must be free to learn all sides of these great questions for himself in order to think for himself, and when he has a clear knowledge of things, then let him make his choice & face the world like a man! The one who has to be guarded from every sort of temptation is weak and more likely to prove a failure than one who has been into the thick of the fray and learned from experience, to guard himself.

Eben Martin, John's father, was a well-to-do man, not rich, but he had a snug little sum in the bank here at the Corners,

and he came from a family of the first settlers. He lived in the house built by his grandfather. He was of a quiet nature and a good neighbor and a hard worker and Mrs. Martin was the same. She was a fine woman as ever you saw and always a good mother, and naturally she was happy at her boy's return, but oh, what a difference had taken place in the wild, headstrong lad of eighteen! What a change had come over John Martin during the two years he had been away. It seemed as though a score of years had heaped their burdens upon his shoulders, and I am thinking it was the loss of his friend, his companion that sat so heavily upon him. His parents did everything in their power to

locate the whereabouts of George Castle, but the earth seemed to have opened and swallowed him, and during all these years he has not been seen or heard of. I'll bet if the truth was known, John Martin's father spent more than five hundred dollars in search for the lad. Well, by & by, Eben Martin and his wife passed away and were laid to rest in the family plot on the side of the hill just back of the house where Eben was born and married and where John was born too. Soon after his parents died, John went to the Orphans' Home and took out a boy. I presume he was lonesome and wanted the child to cheer him up, but Lord! the child grew up just like him. He was a second

John Martin through & through. I don't know what John Martin wanted to take him away from the Home for! He certainly would have been better off where he was, and had a darned sight better training. I wondered how the people down there happened to let the boy go away to a man with no women-folks. Loran is a good boy however, in fact, one of the finest lads in the town. He is about twenty-two or three, but you know as long as a fellow stays single, he is considered a boy until he is about thirty. He is keeping company with Meadis Bartlett and the two are the most popular young people here at the Corners, always happy & full of fun, and the life of every party. But as for John Martin,

he is pining his life away for his boyhood chum, George Castle, I am thinking."

"Are you sure that John Martin took the boy from the Home?" inquired the stranger who had remained silent as he listened attentively to Esden's story.

"Sure," replied the lawyer looking over his glasses, "of course I am sure! Where on earth did you suppose he could have got him?"

"Did John Martin say that he took the boy from the Home?"

"Well no, but of course he did."

"O, I see," said the stranger, "go on with your story. How old was the boy when he took him?"

"O, I don't know exactly. He

might have been twelve or a little less, I should judge. He's a smart boy, now I tell you, & he's a sharp one, too. John Martin has taught him to hold his tongue, and he has taught him the great value of silence. His lips are sealed and you might talk to him until Doom's Day & you would be no nearer to what you wanted to learn when you got through than when you commenced. He is not afraid to say "I do not know" if it fits the case, or to say "I am not at liberty to discuss the subject," if you should question him in regard to his uncle John as he calls John Martin. He will answer "Uncle John must speak for himself," and if you question John Martin in regard

to Loran you will get the same reply. They are a strange pair & no one understands them & they are often the topic of conversation among the folks at the Corners. They live quietly by themselves and ask no favors of anyone, but are always ready to lend a helping hand whenever they are called upon. They do not go out of their way to do good, but they do good whenever it comes their way. Some folks will run their feet off to help someone in China, and let their neighbors starve. John Martin is a sensible man, but he has his faults and odd traits like the rest of us."

The stranger listened eagerly until Esden had finished. He then arose wearily as though

stiff from his journey over the rough country roads.

“Thank you, Oakley Esden. It is getting late and I fear I have kept you out too long, but your story was mighty interesting and someday I will be pleased to hear more of this John Martin, good night.”

“But my friend, you have not stated your business with me, yet!” said the old lawyer wringing his hands nervously.

“No, but I will see you again.”

Esden watched him as he walked slowly down the road, but on remembering that he had not learned the name of this strange pilgrim, called out:

“By what name shall I call you?”

“John Smith.”

Esden stood staring at him with open mouth.

The stranger did not turn around, but walked away leaving the old lawyer scratching his head and muttering to himself.

“John Smith—John Smith. I don’t recall anyone around these parts by that name. It is common enough, the Lord knows, but there have not been any Smiths living at the Corners except old Solomon Smith, and he has been dead for thirty years or more. Let me see, did he have any boys? No, he had three girls, but no boys. Now let’s see, seems to me there was a boy! I’ll ask Betsy, she’ll know, her memory is better than mine.

III

REFLECTIONS

IT was a beautiful night, a night of stars twinkling in a setting of dusky purple, overlaid with a filmy trail of new silver extending from north to south like the veil of a lady bedecked with jewels, waiting the coming of her lover. It was nothing new; it has been seen many, many times—"The Milky Way." In the grass under the gate, the crickets still kept up their cheery songs & the gentle west wind was laden with the perfumed promise of approaching summer.

It was late when John Martin went in doors, his hands in his pockets and his head bowed in profound thought.

Loran had grown weary of waiting for him and gone in more than an hour before.

“Poor Uncle John,” he murmured pityingly over and over.

The youth went to his room and before retiring, opened a little lacquered box in which he kept his few treasures. He took from it his mother’s rosary of well-worn beads, and in the hushed chamber, alone with his own unselfish heart, he said his prayers reverently, quietly, with the touching faith of a little child. He had learned one of the greatest secrets in life—how to pray—alone. When he had finished his devotions he once more tenderly placed it in its place in the box and took out a slender chain of gold with a

small locket attached. He opened the locket carefully and kissed the pictured face within.

“Mother,” he whispered, “dear unhappy mother!”

He gazed long at the pictured face and on this particular night he fancied it looked back at him with a happy smile on the beautiful lips—a mother’s tender smile, which is radiant with all pure and lovely things. The holy hush of a starry night, a newly opened rose wet with dew, a pink cloudlet at evening, the breeze from an old-fashioned flower-garden, the depth of a quiet wood, clear running water, a peach blossom trembling with ecstasy against the April blue, the laugh of a little child, the hallowed peace of a cloister, for

all these are of love's kingdom,
and a mother's love is the heart
of love.

Loran dashed away a sudden
tear and once more took the
rosary from its place in the box
and putting it on the stand near
his bed he laid the open locket
beside it.

He went to the window and
looked out upon the garden where
John Martin still stood dreaming.
The breath of the roses came to
him like incense, the night-wind
shook the branches, and the
vines tapped on the sill like
invisible fingers. He stood there
for some minutes his eyes slowly
filling with tears—not for him-
self, but for Uncle John. Loran
was not a selfish boy. He was all
kindness and love, as gentle and

affectionate as it is possible for a human being to be. He did not think of his own happiness, his one desire was to make his Uncle John happy; that would be happiness enough for him. He knew that happiness is born of real love and that no one can really know what the love of God is, until they first know the sublime heights of human love and self-sacrifice.

Love is a light that can never die, a star that will never set. Its light is a guidance always, even through the darkest storm. Nothing can obscure its beacon rays, even though at times our faith is ever so small. To the wayfarer on the uneven road of life, it is his hope—the eternal foundation of his faith.

Again Loran knelt by his snowy bed and this time he uttered a prayer that was all his own:

“Lord, teach me to serve, rather than to be served; give me understanding that I may be better qualified for the daily tasks of life. Teach me obedience and keep me kind and gentle always.”

A simple prayer, but one that could not fail to reach the ear of the Master when uttered by a devout soul.

Loran turned his lamp low & got into bed and was soon fast asleep. His dreams were sweet, for God had answered his prayers and blessed him with a peaceful heart. Contentment even in our own dreams is a divine gift.

There is much of Heaven upon this earth of ours did we but know it. There is an old legend of a man and woman who lived and loved and worked together, and when they died and went to Heaven, they found they had been living in Paradise all the time.

We are living in Paradise now, but many of us do not know it.

John Martin breathed deep and long like a man awakening from sleep. He passed his hand across his forehead like one just awakening to consciousness and his step was slow as he turned toward the house where all was quiet. Yes, Loran had left the light burning for him, he thought, as he glanced at the

chamber window as he slowly walked up the path.

“O, God, how long!” he whispered to himself.

He entered, closed the door and climbed the stairs wearily. As he reached the top, he steadied himself and staggered along the hall. With his hand upon the doorknob, he paused, as if to free his mind from its burden before he entered what to him was a hallowed chamber. Nothing of evil or unkindness would he allow to enter this holy of holies, this room that was once his mother's, for to him, his mother was a saint among women. Then too his Loran—the idol of his heart was sleeping there and he must not poison the sweet air that Loran was breathing, with

hatred and bitterness that had been burning all day within his own heart. He turned the knob softly, open the door, stepped into the room, threw his hat upon a chair & stepped to the window to breath, for the house was like a prison to him after the fragrant air of the garden. As he stood there he heard the deep regular breathing of the lad and his heart bounded with joy.

“God bless you, boy,” he whispered, lest he might disturb the slumber which was so sweet. As he stood there, another form confronted him—the remembered one of his boyhood’s friend, George Castle. John Martin’s lips curled with a sneering smile and before he thought, he hissed aloud:

“You, again!”

The words rang sibilantly through the room and the sound made him start. He looked uneasily toward the sleeping boy fearing he would awake. But the hiss of his hate was louder to John Martin than it possibly could have been to any one else. It was the convincing power of conscious hatred that made him start and tremble with fear, as the vision of his boyhood's friend stood before him with folded arms and smiled back upon him, maddening him until his soul was imbittered and writhed for vengeance—righteous vengeance, for he believed he was wholly right & his enemy was wholly wrong. He threw back his head like a snake about to strike and

his black eyes burned like coals of fire, and a white froth oozed from his lips.

“You, again! Curse—No, no, not that,” checking himself in the midst of his fury, perhaps a bit unnatural, but it must be remembered there are many unnatural traits in some men. “Not that,” he whispered faintly “but would to God, the memory of your image would fade away from me forever!” He walked back and forth, but the image was ever before him. “Begone! Leave me until the final day of reckoning shall come, George Castle!”

With that, the apparition vanished as quickly as it came.

He passed his hand over his eyes as if to shut out forever

the vision that had been so plainly before him more or less for more than twenty years. He groaned aloud and staggered toward the bed & leaned heavily against the old-fashioned high bedpost, than sank to his knees and placed his face against the hot cheek of the sleeping boy.

“Loran, my—” he whispered oh, so low, but he paused quickly and buried his face in the coverlets, weeping bitterly. His great form shook violently with a tempest of tears. It was not the first time—John Martin had wept many, many times, but always alone. By and by, he arose and turned toward the lamp that was burning low on the stand near the bed. Something gleaming in its uncertain

rays caught his gaze and he bent down to see what it was and saw the locket with the pictured face, & also the rosary. He knelt and gathered the beads and the cross in his trembling fingers and pressed them to his lips.

“Master, teach me to be gentle, too.”

This was John Martin’s first prayer, in many years.

How long he knelt there, he did not know, but when he raised his head and replaced the rosary upon the stand he looked with wonder and amazement into the pictured face incased in the tiny locket before him—the beautiful face that smiled back at him as she used to do in the long years dead and gone. It

seemed strange that he had not noticed it before, but the rosary alone had drew his attention. He turned the light a little higher that he might see it more plainly, and the beauty that was revealed to him was the beauty of the girl he had wooed and won and secretly married in the long ago.

“Rosa!”

He saw again, a green secluded meadow with a silver brook winding through it; a maiden standing kneedeep among the buttercups waving gently in the summer breeze; again he heard the crickets piping in the grass of that fair meadow as he had heard them an hour before, by the garden-gate.

He would have pressed the

locket to his lips, but Loran turned uneasily in his sleep, and the movement brought him to himself. He arose and tossed the locket upon the table after snapping it shut in fingers that twitched nervously. He once more looked upon the sleeping lad, then put out the light and lay down beside him and was soon fast asleep. But his sleep was broken with a haunting dream of Rosa Levering and George Castle, Rosenond Merritt and others that had been connected with him in social life in the long ago, and now and then he would awake to turn & toss wearily upon his pillow.

“O, God, how long, how long!” he muttered as the faint rays of the dawn grew pink

and gray in the east and the
birds began to wake from their
slumber in the trees and the
vines about the little dwelling.

IV
THE HOUSE OF THE
"SINGING BOTTLE"

MEADIS, come here. Your eyes are better than mine. Look down the road through the trees and tell me, 'aint that someone comin' up the hill?"

"Yes, grandma," said the girl shading her eyes, "it is an old man with a heavy beard and he is leaning on a stick. Shall I draw a pail of water from the well?"

"Yes, Meadis, for he will be thirsty and we must have him stop here and rest."

Meadis and her grandma lived in the old house on the hill known as the house of the "Singing Bottle." It was a

small old-fashioned farmhouse and at one time had been painted red, but many years of rain and snow and wind and sun had beat upon it with maddening fury & shone upon it fiercely until it had been washed and bleached of all but a few patches of paint where the clapboards had been the roughest. The chimney was well preserved being a large square one built to stand the storms and tempests of the years. The house was almost hidden with lilac bushes that grew on every side and shut out every bit of sunshine, and in their season were a mass of purple blossoms. The house set back a little from the road, and three or four maples afforded a most splendid shade from the burning

sun on a hot summer day. At the north of the house was an old-fashioned well-sweep which drew up the coldest water that could be found anywhere at the Corners.

The house was supposed to be haunted, but just why, nobody seemed to know. The last person who lived there before Grandma Bartlett, was a Mrs. Dorge, a kind-hearted soul, who surely, could have had no reason for returning from the spirit land to disturb those who purchased her humble dwelling and who were living a simple and honest life. Like the Good Samaritan, Grandma Bartlett was deeply interested in the pilgrims who passed by on their wearisome journey over the hot dusty road

that went zigzagging over the steep frowning hills of that rolling country.

She was not afraid of any of God's children, or any of the Devil's either, and purchased the place "for a song" moving there in spite of the rumors circulated about the "haunts." Her brother in Laconia had died leaving her a small insurance, of between seven and eight hundred dollars after his burial expenses were paid, and with this sum she had been able to buy the place.

"If it is an evil house, it should be converted, for surely, God never intended such a beautiful place to be inhabited by the Devil and so close to the highway where so many people pass during the year," she said

to Meadis, her pretty granddaughter who had come to live with her when her mother eloped with a circus-man who had come to the Corners when Meadis was barely five years old. She was now seventeen, pretty as a princess, & innocent & charming. "We will make it a haven of rest, Meadis, and since we are not able to do very much in givin' to the church here at the Corners, we will serve the Master by helpin' those who are less fortunate than ourselves, and if we do the best we can, I am sure we will not lose a blessin' or the "well done, good and faithful servants; enter into the joys of thy Lord," said Grandma as she removed her glasses and wiped them carefully.

On cleaning the attic, one windy day in the spring of the year, she was startled by a piercing scream that appeared to come from under the eaves where the main part of the house joined the ell. After removing the barrels & boxes that cluttered that corner of the attic Grandma discovered what had been frightening the folks at the Corners and for miles around.

In the corner where the ell joined the main house, a clapboard had been torn away by the storms of many years, revealing a knothole in the rough boards about the size of a walnut, and in direct line with this knothole, a bottle had tipped over in such a way that every gust of wind from the

north or north-east entered it and made a dreadful unearthly sound; in the night, the blood-curdling wail could not fail to make the bravest heart quail with fear, even though he understood the cause. There were a great many bottles stored in this particular corner, but the one that had attained the dignity of a ghost, and had conferred such an evil reputation on the old dwelling was a tall, slim, square shaped green bottle known as the "Singing Bottle" on account of the musical sounds that come from it whenever the wind is high and it is in a drafty place. It is a well known fact that this particular kind of a bottle has been the cause of more haunted houses than any other

one object.

Lawyer Esden & several others of the political-ring at the Corners had been "sore" when they learned the explanation of the "haunt;" they knew that Grandma had bought the place for a "song" paying only about one third of its value, and when Grandma thought of this, and how they would feel, she sat down on an old trunk & laughed until she cried.

"It serves them right," she said aloud, "for bein' such a lot of 'fraid cats, but I wouldn't be scared again like that for a farm down south."

It was the talk and laugh of the town, and to this day, it is called & known of as the house of the "Singing Bottle."

When the stranger had reached the house Grandma was at the gate to greet him with "Good-morning, sir, won't you come in and rest awhile here in the shade? Meadis has gone to the well for nice cold water and she will be here with it directly."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bartlett, I will gladly accept your kind invitation, as it is with you, I am here on business, this most glorious morning."

"What! On business with me?" replied the old lady in surprise.

"Yes, I am not well, and I have come up here to New Hampshire from the city for my health. I was told at the village that maybe I could secure board and lodging with you and your

grandaughter. I wish to be where it is quiet, and this is just the sort of a place I have been looking for. All I ask is plain simple food and plenty of fresh air, sunshine, and good drinking-water."

By this time, Meadis had returned from the well with a pitcher of water and a tumbler.

"Good morning, dear," said the stranger.

"Good morning, sir," replied the girl blushing as she poured out the cool crystal water of which the stranger drank long and deep.

"It is the wine of life," he said half to himself, as he drank.

Meantime, Grandma stood in deep thought, wondering perhaps what was best for her to do

about taking in this stranger. He arose and began to look about him & view the surrounding country that spread so enchantingly before him. But after a few moments he began to fear that she might not take him & he began to be disturbed.

A new thought struck him and he turned once more to her.

“Mrs. Bartlett, if you will board me, I will pay you seven dollars a week and you shall have the money in advance, too.”

“Seven dollars a week!” said Grandma in surprise, “why, sir, we couldn’t think of takin’ seven dollars a week for the board we would have to set before you here at our simple home. Meadis and I live alone, and we live

simple, yet we have good wholesome food and plenty of it. We keep hens and have a pig to kill every fall and another in the spring, so we have all the pork and hams we want, and durin' the summer we almost live out of the garden, as we have all kind of vegetables in abundance and plenty of fruit—apples, pears grapes and plums, & the pastures are full of berries. But we don't have any of the extra things you are used to in the city, and—”

“ Why, my dear Mrs. Bartlett,” interrupted the stranger, “all these good things you mention come from the country and we don't get them until after they have been picked and handled over and over a dozen times and

are far from being fresh. You good country people misunderstand us city folks. It is you, who are living on the cream of the earth, and we city folks are paying high prices for the scum or left-overs. You people have the best of the land."

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Grandma, "but I meant, that Meadis and I would not be able to serve you as you have been used to bein' served in the city. We don't have any of the fixin's, you know. We don't know what beefsteak and such things are. Wine, ice cream, chocolate cake and puddin' and the like of that are not for the poor."

"Why, bless your heart, Mrs. Bartlett, that is what I am trying to escape from! Serve me

with the good things you tell me you have and I shall be more than satisfied."

"What do you say, Meadis?" said Grandma, turning to the girl at her side.

The stranger looked longingly at her. He looked so pale and weary, something aroused pity in her heart.

"Let him stay, grandma," she whispered.

"God bless you, child," he said.

"But it will mean more hard work, Meadis."

"I don't mind, grandma."

So it was decided he should come to live with them at the old house of the "Singing Bottle" the next day, and he went back down the hill after having an

abundant old-fashioned dinner with them, his heart leaping & bounding with joy, and a song of thanksgiving in his soul.

“Surely, God is good,” he whispered.

The next day he returned, bag and baggage & was soon settled in a large square room on the upper floor where he could look down into the village and across the broad fields of growing things.

Once alone in his room he laughed aloud.

“After twenty years I have come back to my old home town, and like Rip Van Winkle, nobody knows me—not even my boyhood’s chum, John Martin.” He paused a moment with bowed

head as though in prayer. A force of habit that had come upon him with the years of solitude and loneliness. But the mood soon left him and he went to the old-fashioned bureau and looked at himself in the mirror. "Nobody knows me, and I don't wonder, nevertheless it is no one but you, George Castle. You have been as one dead to them all these years and you must keep it up," he said to himself, never dreaming that there would and must, come a day when they would learn the truth. He removed his disguise—a gray beard and wig, bathed his face and hands and sat down in a low rocker near the window, being careful not to get near enough to the panes for anyone

to see him from the road. He sat there with his hands in his pockets and began to dream, for he too, had grown to live in the past.

He rocked slowly back and forth fumbling with his watch chain nervously. He was built something like John Martin, fair of face, save for the deep lines under his eyes that told plainly of some harrowing trouble brought on by the years.

Handsome, yes, George Castle was a handsome man, & unlike John Martin, he had never been in the power or range of Cupid's silver darts, but had lived out his days alone, but he had learned like the rest of us, what is means to have sinned and suffer.

“So John Martin is still in the land of the living. He must never know of my return. I wonder who this boy Loran is? Can it be—” he stopped short as if in deadly fear lest someone might overhear him, for he had the very bad habit of talking to himself. “It will be well perhaps not to mention names here at the Corners, but I must find out who this boy is. I will, do it! I can do it, for money will do anything, that is, if you only have enough of it. No I am mistaken,” he said thoughtfully to himself as he brushed aside a tear that was about to drop from his thin, pale cheek where it had lingered for a moment until it was swelled by another that slowly flowed from his dark eyes.

“If money could do anything, I would give every penny of my fortune to buy back my friendship with John Martin. O, God, how I have suffered these long years. How I have craved for the companion of my boyhood days. Can there be any Hell worse than the consciousness of knowing that all humanity has lost respect and faith in you? To know that I cannot return to my old home-town and look these honest people in the face and receive their warm hand-clasp of welcome? That I must live down this lie forever perhaps with no hope of pardon, forgiveness and love? O, God of mercy have pity on this sinner of sinners, George Castle, & teach him to atone!”

He buried his face in his hands for the tears came faster and faster, and it is a sight from which angels turn when a strong man weeps. Leaning forward he rested his elbows on his knees and wept in silence. By and by, he arose, once more bathed his face and went to the window where he stood & began to think and to plan to live down to the very end the mistake of his misguided youth, the one false step that had set its abhorrent seal upon his soul.

V

ROSEMOND'S LOVE

IN a little far-off town in northern Pennsylvania, Rosemond Merritt lived a quiet life with her only aunt Mrs. Burns. Rosemond's rippling tresses were lightly silvered with the snows of winter, but the roses of youth and summer still bloomed on her fair, smooth cheeks. Tall, of Junoesque proportions & queenly carriage, graceful and attractive in beauty and manner, she would have graced a palace, & seemed as much out of place in the village school where she taught as an orchid in a cabbage patch. She was also a teacher in the Sunday School, a devout and untiring worker in the church,

and a ministering angel to the old, the sick, the poor, and the "shut-in."

I first introduce my reader to her on a Sunday morning when she is gathering flowers to carry to two or three invalids in the little village. While she has been carefully arranging the flowers in a wicker basket her aunt who has been watching her closely for some minutes, speaks.

"Rosemond, my dear, you are always thinking of others, with never a thought for yourself. My dear, do you realize what day this is?"

"Why, yes, auntie, it is Sunday but pray, there cannot be any harm in carrying flowers to the sick," she replied wonderingly as she paused in her work.

“I didn’t mean that, Rosemond. Think again.”

Rosemond turned and faced her in surprise. The two stood looking at each other. Rosemond was the first to speak. Her dark eyes snapped fitfully and her lips quivered a little, for she felt that she could guess what was coming, but she hoped she might be mistaken.

“Why, auntie, what do you mean?”

Her aunt smiled.

“Rosemond, it is your birthday. You are forty years old today.”

“Auntie, the idea of you telling my age right out like that,” she said blushing & a little perplexed at her aunt’s unusual freedom of speech.

The fair feminine sex have always had the praise and glory of being the bravest when it comes to the testing-hour of the hard and enduring things of life, but there are a few things they find it difficult to bear, especially when their age is mentioned. The man laughs and wonders why.

“Rosemond, why will you waste the best part of your life? You can never be young but once. God has spared you any great trouble and He has kept you young and beautiful because you have been good and kind to His children, and He has been rewarding you with more blessings than perhaps you have really considered & really been thankful for. No, you cannot

always be young, my dear, and I cannot always be with you. There is a parting time that must come to us all."

Rosemond understood what her aunt meant and it vexed her. She tried to be forbearing, but there are times when flesh and blood rebels, and for a moment, lost control of the temper she usually governed so well.

"Auntie, do you want to get rid of me, do you want to marry me off?" she questioned the crimson rising to her temples and her bright eyes snapping stormily as she looked up from her flowers.

"Oh—no—! Not—"

"If you wish to get rid of me—"

"Rosemond," said Mrs Burns

impatiently, "will you please wait until I have finished? I don't want to get rid of you—I don't want you to go away! I had not thought of such a thing—nonsense. You are all I have in the world to love and care for & I want you to be happy, but I know that you are not. You are always dreaming and waiting for that good-for-nothing, John Martin, who already has a wife and child, & yes, perhaps three or four of them, for all you know. Now there is Milton Ashbury who is handsome, wealthy, and honest as the day is long,—he is just dying for you to become his wife. He can give you a fine home, an automobile, a maid, and servants, and in fact, every-

thing your heart can wish and crave, and you won't so much as notice him more than to say "how-do-you-do" or something like that. Now it seems to me that if I were young like—"

"Don't, auntie, don't," said Rosemond with a wave of her hand.

"Why—now don't be foolish Rosemond."

"Aunt Hannah, I shall never marry Milton Ashbury, and I shall not give him the slightest encouragement. He is nothing to me—never was, and never can be. That is final. He may be all you say, and be able to give me all you say, and I am sure you mean well, auntie, but you don't understand—you cannot! I cannot marry anyone."

“Huh,” added her aunt with a smile that struck like a knife at Rosemond’s heart and aroused the embers of love that sweetly slumbered there.

“As for John Martin, I believe in him. I believe he is true, and though he could not explain the reason he asked me to wait, he told me that he loved me and would one day come or send for me. Because of this, aunt Hannah, I shall wait and hope. He shall find me true. He shall know that I have loved him all these years. I will wait for him, but I will not break my heart in doing so. I will wait in patience and live and help others to live, and I will be happy. God is good, yes, He is good and He blesses me every day

and blesses me far more than I deserve, and I shall not rebel, even though all the devils that haunt the garden of Gethsemane are set free to ridicule & torment me! Aunt Hannah I shall wait for John Martin."

She smiled sweetly for her heart still leaped with love and was filled with the happy dreams of her lover of the years that had passed oh, so swiftly as the years do. She had been patient, had kept a stout heart and a hopeful spirit, and had retained all her girlish beauty and grace.

Aunt Hannah shrugged her shoulders as she wiped her steel-bowed spectacles. She too, had loved and waited, but not so patiently and with not so much faith and hope as her neice. She

had been married three times & was still a widow.

“Rosemond, don't you think you are a little too quixotic? I do not wish to stand between you and your lover dear, but you must be reasonable. Stop a moment and think the matter over, and you will see how foolish and blindly you have been lead all these years as a child with its heart filled with myths and fairy stories. You must remember that at the age of sixteen or eighteen and even twenty, people say and do a great many things that when they have had years of experience behind them, they are prone to forget or if remembered at all to ridicule. Things regarded as of the gravest importance at

twenty seem absurd & impossible at forty. Has it never occurred to you that perhaps John Martin has long ago forgotten you, and may not be able now to recall the name of the girl he courted twenty years ago or more in Johnstown? Have you never thought of this? Don't be foolish Rosemond and throw your life away."

Rosemond's lips quivered a little and for a moment her heart grew faint and homesick.

"Don't, aunt Hannah, don't! For God's sake let me at least cherish the sweetest dream I ever had," she cried as she turned away from her flowers, radiant with beauty and glorified with the morning sunbeams and sparkling with the dew-jewels

from the purple casket of the tranquil night.

Her aunt went to her and slipped her arm lightly about her waist.

“Forgive me dearie if I seemed unkind. I didn’t mean to be, and perhaps I should not have meddled with your treasured affairs, but I’m sorry. Go on loving your lover and believing in him. Aunt Hannah will never chide you again.”

Rosemond turned and took the little old lady in her arms and kissed the faded wrinkled face and wiped away the tears with her own handkerchief.

“Auntie,” she said smiling through her own tears “we will live and be happy together, you and I.”

“Rosemond, we will gather the roses while we may for God intends for all His children to be happy. All the grief that comes into our lives is brought through our own planning or those who are connected with us. It is hard sometimes to understand this and see it in just this light, but if we are careful and search our lives diligently, I am sure we will see what has caused all the trouble that brought us sorrow.”

“Yes, auntie, but what have I ever done that I should be made to suffer twenty years or more?”

“Rosemond, you are connected with another who has sinned. Will you forgive me if I speak plainly?”

“Yes.”

“John Martin has sinned, and you sanction his sin while you cling to him.”

“Yes, auntie, you are right, I understand.”

She stood there in deep thought holding the flowers she had gathered.

Her aunt touched her lightly on the arm.

“You had better be going out with the flowers you have gathered for Mrs. Dexter and the other poor souls, Rosemond, for it will soon be time to go to meeting, the first bell has already rung.”

“Yes,” said Rosemond as she took the basket on her arm and went down through the garden stopping at the gate long enough to wave a “good-bye.”

Once on her way and alone, she paused in the shade of a stately maple and drew from her bosom a small miniature case which she opened and looked long and lovingly upon a pictured face—a small tintype of a handsome young man. She smiled and held it to her lips.

“John,” she whispered.

O, how often Rosemond had sat in the twilight and looked upon that picture, the shadow of her heart's mate. She wondered how he would look after a lapse of twenty years or more. She wondered if God had spared him changes that come to one and all who carry the burden of a heavy cross. She wondered too if he were thinking of her, this very

minute, and was waiting as patiently for her as she was waiting for him.

It was her first love and she was faithful. Yes, Rosemond Merritt loved John Martin and she found happiness in her great love and faithfulness in waiting for him, though at times she was greatly disturbed, for aunt Hannah was often harsh and upbraiding, and yet she did not intend to be, but there are moments when things seem to go wholly wrong and we crave a desire to heap the heaviest part of our troubles upon our friends and those who are near and dear to us, and aunt Hannah was of this sort of nature. Yet too, she was kind and was glad to have her neice with her.

That afternoon when Rosemond was on her way home from Sunday School, she heard a quick step, and turning, looked into the face of Milton Ashbury.

“Good afternoon, Rosemond. May I walk home with you?”

“Yes, if you wish,” she replied pleasantly.

“Rosemond, I am going to Alaska.”

“Alaska!” she said looking at him in surprise.

“Yes,” he added, waiting a moment as if to see what comment she would make or how she would feel about his long absence.

“My, but I had not heard of it.”

“No?” he questioned.

“No, indeed.”

“It was a trip hastily planned, or rather made known to me. You see, father has business up there in the gold-fields and as I have always wanted to go there, and he is not well, he decided to send me in his place. Of course I am delighted to go, and yet I hate to be away from home. You see it will be the first time I have ever been away for so long a time.”

“Why, will you be gone very long?” she inquired.

“Three or four months, at least. Why?”

“What does your mother say?”

“Mother don't want me to go, but you know how it is, mothers are always that way. They want to keep the children at home always.”

Rosemond's mind went roaming back through the vanished years when she had been of the same opinion, and now that her own mother was gone, Milton's careless words came back to her, and she saw a lonely, neglected grave on a distant hill.

O, God, what heart has not felt that same thrill of utter loneliness when it has heard the sacred name of Mother lightly spoken!

"Yes," said Rosemond thoughtfully. She knew he had spoken from an untried heart and so far in life, had been spared at least, that one great sorrow. "God bless the mothers."

"O, yes," acquiesced Milton, "mother is all right, but you see what I mean, Rosemond,

when a fellow has grown up and is in business he cannot always be tied to his mother's apron strings, can he?"

"I suppose not, but Milton remember this: Do not let your business rob you of affection, for as surely as you live, sometime in the days to come, you will regret it."

"Another sermon?" he laughingly inquired.

"No, it is not a sermon, and since you can only look upon it lightly, I will say no more, but when a mother is gone there is no one that can fill her place."

"No?"

"No, Mr. Ashbury, no one can. My mother died when I was approaching womanhood, but she is still my mother and

she is all the world to me, and now that she is gone, I think how little I showed appreciation of all the sacrifices & self-denials she made for me, and now, it is too late to speak the words of love or tell her that I am sorry. Still she is my mother. I have her picture here in a small miniature case that I carry always."

"O, please let me see it, Rosemond?"

She blushed, as she thought of the pictured face opposite the one of her angel mother, and she hesitated to let him see it, but what could she do, after her statement, for if she should refuse, he might think she was talking for effect & had spoken a falsehood. Biting her lip, she took out once more the well-worn

case and opened it.

Milton Ashbury looked upon the sweet girlish face and then at the other beside her.

“A pretty face,” he said, “and this one—your brother?”

“No. I never had a brother. It is—it is a friend.”

He understood.

“O, Rosemond, don’t tell me I am too late!” he said earnestly.

“Too late,” she said trembling a little. “Mr. Ashbury, I do not understand you.”

“Rosemond, yes you do, you must!”

She was silent and so was he until they had reached the gate of her aunt’s humble home. He opened it for her to enter and she passed through and turned to say good-bye.

“Wait, Rosemond, a moment.”

She bent down and gathered a spray of mignonette.

“All these past fifteen years you have been here at your aunt Hannah’s, we have known each other & I have loved you. I have wanted to tell you so many times, but I did not know just how to do it, but today, the day before I am to leave for my long trip, I decided to tell you. Is there no hope?”

“No, Mr. Ashbury.”

He hesitated, his face darkly flushed with emotion.

“But may I write to you while I am away?”

“Why, yes, if you want to.”

“And will you answer my letters?”

“Yes, certainly.”

He took her hand and held it for a moment and when he released it, he took the spray of mignonette she had plucked from her garden.

She reached for it.

“No, Rosemond, not until we meet again. Good-bye.”

She did not have time to speak for the next moment he was gone.

She stood at the gate and watched him out of sight. She knew something of how he felt and she pitied him, and almost wished she had showed the pictures to him before. She turned and went into the house and to her own room. With the door closed and locked she went to the window and sat down on the window-seat, to think over the past conversation.

“What have I done? Have I given him a moment’s encouragement? Well, I never intended to, and when he writes to me, I will answer his letter and tell him the whole truth and that he must never expect me to marry him.”

Her aunt rapped on the door softly.

“Yes, auntie.”

“Dinner is ready. Come down and eat and than we will take a little walk along the river road.”

“Yes, auntie, I will be down in a moment.”

She waited until her aunt’s footsteps had died away, then she once more took out the little miniature case and looked upon the face of her lover.

“John, John, they tell me love is stronger than death. O, if this can be true, why don’t you come to me? I do not doubt you—I cannot. My heart tells me that you are mine, as I am yours, and if love is so powerful, can it not bring us together once again?”

She looked out of the window. It was a perfect day and the blooming garden seemed to exhale a healing balm that penetrated to the depths of her soul. She bathed her face and went down stairs with a smile upon her scarlet lips.

“I will wait,” she said softly to herself.

VI
MEADIS' OATH

GOOD morning, Meadis," said George Castle, or rather John Smith, as we are to know him at present.

"Good-morning, " she replied as she met him at the door. She was on her way to the store for her grandmother. Mrs. Bartlett always believed in doing all one could as early as possible in the morning before it was too hot. She was always up before the sun and had the most of the work done before breakfast. She never believed in letting the sun get up before her. "There are many duties to be preformed every day & I believe one should mix a certain amount

of pleasures with our work and it can't be done when one spends the best part of the day in bed."

"Seems to me, you are making a rather early start to do your shopping."

"Yes, sir, grandma believes in keeping out of the hot sun as much as possible, so we always do our marketing before breakfast," said Meadis with a smile.

"A very good idea, a very good idea, & if you don't mind I will walk along with you."

"I would be pleased to have you, Mr. Smith, if you want to come along," said Meadis a little vexed, for she had hopes of meeting Loran on his way to the mill, as he usually made the trip there before breakfast so he could feed the horses and

get ready for his day's work. Though decidedly put out she concealed her disappointments with a pretense at cheerfulness. She felt the color mounting to her cheeks and was afraid his sharp old eyes might notice it, but if he did, he would think it due to her modesty, as he had already remarked her timidity.

It was a beautiful June morning and the air was sweet with all the countless perfumes of an early summer day. There had been a light shower during the night and all Nature was cool and refreshing after its crystal bath.

At the foot of the hill they met Loran, and from his evident disgust at finding her with a companion, Meadis knew he

desired to speak with her alone, so excusing herself politely, she stepped to the side of the road where he was.

John Smith recognized the lad with a faint smile and a cordial "good morning." Loran responded as he removed his hat.

For a moment the two stood staring at each other, but it was so momentary Meadis did not notice it.

John Smith turned to her with a smile.

"Let me take your basket, Meadis," he said, "and I will leave it at the store and you can get it later."

"I am afraid it will be too much bother, Mr. Smith."

"Not at all, child," he replied as he took it from her arm.

“Thank you.”

She watched him as he walked away. She was now, trying to vex Loran a bit, for she paid little attention to what he was saying.

“Well!”

“Sir?” she returned with a laugh as she faced him.

“Say, Meadis, who is he? He looks like the man who stopped at our house the other night and inquired the way to Lawyer Esden’s office, of Uncle John.”

“He is our new boarder,” said Meadis with a toss of her head as she turned to watch him out of sight.

“Boarder! Well, I don’t think taking in “boarders” should in any way make you so high and mighty,” said Loran with a

laugh. "Say, Meadis, who is he, anyhow? Where did he hail from?"

"How should I know? Say, don't be so inquisitive."

"But I am, Meadis, there is something about that man I don't like. I don't know just what it is, but say, Meadis, 'ain't you had that sort of feeling yourself, before now? Of course you have." He was getting a little curious and she knew it, but it was not of the jealous nature of which Meadis was thinking. Loran remembered the old man and was curious to know what had brought him to the Corners. He had also noticed that the old gentleman was mighty inquisitive, & this might have aroused his curiosity.

“Getting a little jealous,” she inquired coquettishly.

“Nonsense, Meadis, but since you do not care to tell me about him, we will drop the subject. I wanted to speak with you—”

“Loran dear,” she interrupted “I didn’t mean to try and put you off. Really, there is nothing private about the affair. All I know about this man, is that his name is John Smith and that he came to our house night before last and wanted to get board for the Summer. He is an invalid and wished to get out of the city, so grandma and I decided to take him, and he is going to pay us seven dollars a week! Just think of in, Loran. Seven dollars a week—a dollar a day. It will help us wonder-

fully. Grandma says I can have a new dress and a wide-rim hat with red roses like the one we saw at The Weirs last summer. Won't that be lovely, Loran dear? Aren't you glad for me? And he is such a nice old man, too, and not so dreadfully old either. And he helps us lots 'round the house. And Loran, there is something sad—something pathetic about him that almost makes me cry. What it is I don't know. At times, he seems to be awful "blue" and deep lines under his eyes speak of some great trouble and last night grandma and I heard him talking to himself. We could not understand anything and we did not try. Grandma made me play hymns on the organ for

more than an hour. 'If he wanted us to hear him' said she, 'he wouldn't be up there and I never brought you up to be an eavesdropper. If you've nothing else to do than to be listening to what is not intended for you to hear, you can go to the organ and play hymns for a-while, then perhaps you will be doing someone some good.' But I wish I knew what it is that seem to trouble him, for if we only knew, perhaps we could help him over the hard places, for you know grandma is wonderful in that respect. She is indeed a burden bearer."

"Yes," said Loran, thoughtfully. "Grandma is a saint. She has been mother & grandmother both, to Uncle and myself."

“Yes, Loran.”

They both stood there for a moment in silent meditation.

Meadis was the first to speak.

“Loran, I have told you all I know about this man, John Smith.”

“That’s all right, Meadis. I do not doubt you and I was not inquisitive in the way that you thought, but it all seemed so strange, I couldn’t help from speaking about it as I did. I am glad you and Grandma can be of service to him, and indeed he ought to be pleased to have a chance to spend the summer at such a cosy place as it is at the “singing bottle.” And now Meadis, I have a little surprise for you. There is to be an excursion on the lake next

Saturday and I want you to go with me. Now don't say no, for I am not going to take 'no' for an answer," he said as he took her two hands within his own.

"But Loran," she began.

"Now don't come on with those old excuses again, Meadis, for they are stale and out of date, and as Father Rodney says, 'If there's to be excuses, give us a few new ones,'" he said with a laugh. "If you don't go with me this time, Meadis, I shall begin to think you don't want to go anywhere with me."

"Loran," she replied lowering her pretty head, that he might not see the tears that were filling her eyes, "I have nothing to wear that would be pleasing for such an occasion."

“Nothing to wear!”

“Nothing but this old faded lilac gown,” she replied with the tears falling like jewels and running down her cheeks, as she was unable to control them any longer.

“Why, I—” commenced Loran but she interrupted him.

“Everywhere I go, folks say, ‘there goes Meadis Bartlett. Anyone could tell her a mile off. She always wears that old lilac dress.’”

“I don’t care if they do, Meadis. You are just the same dear sweetheart to me, no matter what you wear. So remember, next Saturday, I shall come to the house for you, bright & early. You will go, won’t you, Meadis?” he coaxed as he drew her to

him and kissed away the tears from her cheek.

“I will talk it over with grandma and let you know tomorrow,” she said.

“But you want to go?” he questioned.

“Yes, Loran.”

“I knew you would. Now I will have to be going, for it is time I was at the stable. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

It was late Friday night when Meadis entered her room to retire. Grandma had gone to bed early, and seemingly, she was the only one in the house astir. As she placed the lamp upon the table, a low rap sounded on the panel.

“May I come in, Meadis?”

“Yes,” she answered.

The door opened softly, and in walked John Smith.

In an instant, Meadis remembered Loran’s words of three days before. ‘There is something about that man I don’t like,’ and for a moment she feared him, though she did not outwardly show it.

“It is rather late in the evening to call on a young lady and in her own room, too,” began Smith, “but it seemed to be about the only way I could see you alone, Meadis. You don’t mind do you?”

“Not at all, Mr. Smith.”

“Meadis, can I trust you with a secret?” he began, looking her straight in the eyes. “Don’t be

afraid, child, but I must have your assurance."

"Certainly."

"And I can trust you fully?"

"Yes, Mr. Smith, you can trust me with anything! I have been under the guidance of my saintly grandmother too long, to be insnared with dishonesty now!"

"Dishonesty!"

He startled. The word struck at him like a blow, but he had become accustomed to it, and he forced a smile.

"A modern Margaret and Faust," he said to himself.

She watched him closely.

"I understand, Meadis, but that is a great trust, and you have seen so little of the wickedness that is in this world of ours.

Have you ever read Goethe's
'Faust'?"

"No, sir, grandma would not
not let me read story books."

He laughed.

"Why do you laugh, do you
doubt me, Mr. Smith?"

No, child—Meadis, we are
kept in ignorance, and then we
are punished if we make even
so small a mistake."

"I do not understand you."

"No. You have been shielded.
You do not know what it is to
suffer for twenty years "

She went to him with pity in
her innocent heart and placed
her hand lightly upon his arm.

Meadis was a good girl but
she was very inquisitive, and
this is often the cause of our
downfall. We do not mean to

be inquisitive perhaps, but it is human nature to want to know, and when things are hidden from us, there is a stronger and deeper desire to know.

“Mr. Smith, let me help you. You speak of a secret. I assure you, you can trust me with anything.”

We talk of being insnared, and yet, we are the very ones ourselves, who set the snare. Man has always been his worse enemy. Meadis felt quiet sure she was about to enter the secret room of this stranger's life, but she did not realize how little, she was going to learn.

Again, the stranger smiled—and so did Faust.

“Thank you, Meadis.”

He stepped softly across the

room and took from her bureau a small Bible and confronted her.

“Meadis, will you place your hand on this Holy book and repeat those words?”

She did so.

“Thank you,” he added with a sickly smile. “Now remember Meadis, you have taken a solemn oath. You have sworn solemnly.”

“Yes, and you will find me firm as the hills,” she laughed, little dreaming how soon her mirth would be changed to dread and fear.

He laughed too, but there was not so much mirth in it. She was innocent, but he knew he was working evil to get her into his power to do his bidding, so his, was not so pleasing.

“That is the sort of a pard I want,” he said.

“A pard!” she repeated.

“Yes, you have joined hands with me, and I can trust you fully, now. Meadis Bartlett, you are a Christian and I know I can trust you. You will be my helper and I shall reward you splendidly if you are successful, and I feel you well be.” He took from his pocket a beautiful diamond ring. “See, Meadis! The day you can tell me who Loran is and where he came from, this ring belongs to you. Do you understand me? All you will have to do, is to get Loran to tell you his past history.”

“But he won’t,” she replied with a slight shrug of her pretty shoulders.

“Nonsense. A girl’s lover will do anything she wants him to, especially when he is as deeply in love as this young Loran is.”

“Sir!”

“I beg pardon, my dear, I did not mean to insinuate that your lover was a weakling, a simpleton, or anything like that, but you know a fellow is easily led by the girl he admires.”

“Perhaps, but it is different with Loran. He has a mind of his own, besides, John Martin has been his lord and master altogether too long. I tell him he is a fool to stand it. I’d like to see anyone steer me around as he does Loran! I believe young folks ought to have some rights. Don’t you, Mr. Smith?”

“Certainly.”

He smiled again, as he stood there listening to her girlish complaints, for she too, was like a child in leading-strings. But she was so earnest in her fault-finding with another, she did not notice him.

“How long has Loran been with John Martin?”

“I don't know. Everyone says he came from the Orphans' Home, and I presume he did, and if that is the case, there won't be very much to find out, I'm afraid.”

“That's just what I want you to find out, Meadis. I may be altogether wrong, but I don't believe Loran came from the Orphans' Home and I am almost sure that Loran himself, knows better. But I want you to ferret

this out for me. Will you?"

Suddenly a look of fear came across the girl's face.

"Who are you?" she said.

"Never mind. You will know later. Remember your oath."

For a moment it seemed as though her heart had stopped, and she feared perhaps she had done some great wrong.

For a moment he trembled and put his hand to his face to make sure that his disguise was secure and properly adjusted.

"There, there, child, I am afraid I am frightening you."

"Please, Mr. Smith—"

"I am not asking any impossibility, Meadis. All you have to do, is to find out who Loran is and where he came from."

She watched him steadily and seemed to be in deep thought.

“I should think you would want to know, Meadis. Pray, what harm could come from asking him that much?”

“And if I fail?”

“Why, that will be all right. Only don't mention this secret conversation.”

“O, yes, I understand.”

“And you will try?”

“Yes.”

“You will have a splendid opportunity tomorrow while on the excursion and I am almost sure you will be successful. You will try, Meadis?”

“Yes, I'll try, Mr. Smith.”

“That settles it. Now remember, Meadis, this is to be confidential. You are not to

mention one syllable to your grandmother, nor let her know that I have spoken to you in secret," he said giving her a keen warning look.

"Yes, sir, I understand."

"Good night, my dear."

"Good night."

John Smith left the room wringing his hands & chuckling to himself.

"She'll do it, she'll do it. I knew she would!"

VII

THE "BEST ROOM"

UNCLE John, why do you keep the best room in the house closed?" inquired Loran one day as he saw John Martin coming from the "best room" and locking the door carefully behind him.

"Because we have all the room we can use and what's the use of having the whole house cluttered up?"

"But why should we close the best room in the house, the pleasantest one, and why keep it furnished in such style that we have to hire Grandma to tidy it up every Fall and Spring—cleaning and dusting it thoroughly when nobody ever

uses it?"

"Loran, you ask altogether too many questions. You know the room was my mother's sitting-room and contains all her things and that they have to be taken care of, yet you keep pestering me about it as though you thought it was a secret place where I worshiped some gilded god," replied John Martin impatiently.

"But why can't we keep it in shape, Uncle John?" persisted Loran.

"Such work is woman's work, and besides we have about all we can do, don't we?"

"Yes, and so does Grandma, and she's lame."

"Loran, will you please stop teasing me? I have given you

the reason for keeping the room closed. Isn't that enough?"

"The reason?" replied Loran inquiringly, with trembling lips as he looked John Martin in the face.

John Martin turned away. He could not stand the gaze of those honest eyes. Animal like, he felt like creeping into the dark. He felt the touch of a shadowy hand oh, so lightly upon his arm and he heard from lips that had long been silent in that sleep that knows no waking nor unrest, "John, our boy—our baby."

"Rosa," he whispered with bowed head. The lash was upon his heart again, but he bore its stripes with set lips, and wept in silence.

“Yes, Uncle John. I will not trouble you again about it,” said Loran as he took his hat and went out into the garden. The flowers seemed to be glad of his company and with every gentle breeze to coax him with their sweet perfume to linger among them, but he had no eyes for their beauty.

A thousand mischievous little elves of curiosity danced before him, every one pointing to the closed room and enticing him to find some way to enter it. He knew it contained some objects or object that his benefactor concealed from him, and he had remarked many times that when John Martin visited the room he always emerged in the blackest mood. He knew he

was doing wrong to pry into his uncle's secret but he was determined to see the carefully guarded room for himself. He felt that it might concern himself in some way, else why did John Martin fly into a rage when questioned about it. Grandma Bartlett certainly saw the room and its contents when she swept and dusted and aired it twice a year, and Loran came to the conclusion that for some reason that must vitally concern himself, he was the only one who was denied the freedom of it. With the firm resolve to watch for a chance to enter the forbidden place and explore it, he arose with the air of a man who has decided on some momentous deed, and sauntered

through the garden-gate.

“I’ll have a peep into the place anyway, if it costs me a leg,” he muttered angrily. “Uncle John treats me as if I were a boy and must be kept in ignorance of everything. I’m sick and tired of these stories about the Orphans’ Home, and my being the pet of a fool-hearted man. If uncle John’s hiding anything about me in that room, I have a right to know, and I’m going to, if not by fair means, then by foul.”

He went to the little rustic summer-house and sat down to think the recent conversation over.

It was not long before Loran had his chance. Business called John Martin to Lakeport, where

he would have to remain all day. As soon as Loran started for the mill, John Martin struck out across the fields for Lakeport. Martin did not tell Loran that he was going to be away for the day, because he knew what was in the boy's mind and he did not care to tempt him. But Loran had seen the note which summoned him, for it had been carelessly left upon the table for a few minutes.

Martin was no more than out of sight when Loran turned back.

"Now is my chance to see what the 'best-room' contains," he said to himself as he unlocked the end-door and entered the house. Loran had always been a good boy and his conscience

troubled him a bit, but his curiosity was stronger than his scruples, and he argued there could be no harm, as he would not disturb anything.

In an old box in the woodshed, he remembered of having seen a bunch of discarded keys, and after trying them all, he found one that would unlock the door of the mysterious room. As the door swung slowly open, the stifling perfume of withered roses and lavender came to him like the haunting breath of a dead summer, and he entered the room as quietly as a mouse. Every sound, the creaking of a loose board, the whisper of branches in the gentle breeze outside, caused him to start and tremble as he advanced timidly

to the middle of the room where he paused and looked around in wonder and surprise to find nothing out of the ordinary such as he had expected to see in this strange room that had always been under lock and key. As he stood looking about him, his gaze chanced to stray to the opposite wall and lo! there hung three life-size portraits in oil, evidently the work of a master of the brush, and that must have cost John Martin a considerable sum. One was John Martin himself, another was George Castle his boyhood companion, (though Loran did not know this,) but the third picture puzzled him most. Surely it was not his mother, and yet it was such a sweet

face that seemingly looked down upon him. Who could she be? He tried hard to think but he could not recall anyone he had ever seen that looked like her. It might have been John Martin's mother when she was young, but why would he place it between a stranger's face and his own? Loran looked long upon the woman's face and studied its smiling, radiant features. How long he stood there he did not know, but he did not dare to tarry longer, for he was anxious to see more of this now interesting room, but the face before him was so fascinating it held him as if by a spell. He had always thought his mother was the most beautiful woman in the world, but here was

another, fairer still. "Who can it be?" he asked himself, over and over as he stepped a little nearer. Once more he looked upon the picture of George Castle & he said aloud: "I have seen that face before—those eyes!" but he was so interested in the lovely woman's face, he paid very little attention to either of the others.

The room was full of quaint old mahogany furniture and bric-a-brac of a by-gone fashion. Things that were eloquent of a woman's occupancy were everywhere but in perfect order and excellent taste. The chairs were upholstered in old-fashioned haircloth, but were splendidly preserved and as good as new. Lace curtains were at the three

windows which were screened by dark shades that made the room so dimly lit Loran had to raise them a little. Across one corner of the room was an old-fashioned square piano with a sheet of music on the rack still open as though someone had left it in haste. Loran stooped to read the title. It was "Then You'll Remember Me." Again his fair face clouded.

"Can it be that John Martin had another sweetheart?"

But quickly he dismissed the thought.

"No, I will not think that of Uncle John."

But on further examining the sheet of music, he discovered scribbled on the margin above the title, "Rosemond's favorite

song," and wondered who this Rosemond could be. His mother's name was Rosa and perhaps John Martin had at one time been her lover and when she had married another, John Martin had turned misanthrope and lived alone all these years. Loran left the piano and went to a quaint old writing-desk but found it locked. In a vase on the mantle he discovered a key and found it fitted the lock.

His heart thumped so loudly that he was almost afraid, but curiosity prompted him to make the most of his opportunity so he turned the key & tipped the lid back. He opened a drawer here and there until he came upon a packet of letters tied with a faded blue ribbon. He

started to take them out, but his conscience interfered.

“No, I will not! If Uncle John had wanted me to see them, he would have shown them to me long ago,” he said to himself in an awed whisper.

“But is it any worse than entering the room?” accused his troubled spirit.

“No,” he answered with a faint smile.

He turned & faced the pictured face of John Martin, and those eyes that had watched over him so tenderly through all the years since he had been at the Martin homestead, seemed to change and the mute lips seemed to say in surprise & accusation:

“Loran!”

It brought him to himself and

he felt the blush of shame mount slowly to his temples. For a moment he looked into those eyes. He hurried from the room and locking the door leaned heavily against it, with the slow flush of shame stealing to the roots of his hair.

“I have sinned, but I will sin no more,” he cried.

“But the deceit you have practiced?” questioned his guilty conscience.

“I will confess my disobedience and meanness,”

“You dare not.”

“I will! Uncle John loves me. He trusts me, and I will not betray that trust.”

“But you have.”

For a few minutes Loran stood there in deep thought. He

was being severely chastened. By and by, the dawn of true repentance came and flooded his soul with its light of glory.

“I will go to Father Rodney and make a full confession.”

“But that will not make it right between John Martin and yourself.”

Loran quailed and the room seemed to echo with a taunting laugh that never issued from human lips, still, the light that had dawned upon his darkened soul did not forsake him, for he was determined. He looked about him, but no one was there. He fled into the garden.

“Dear Lord, what have I done?” he moaned.

“You have betrayed a great trust and John Martin will never

forgive you," replied the accusing voice over his shoulder.

"Its a lie!" he said aloud.

And he spoke the truth, for no one ever sincerely repented of deceit or hypocrisy or any evil act who was not forgiven. Not always by the injured one, but by his Maker. A true repentance is always acceptable in the eyes of the Lord.

"Its a lie," Loran repeated, and he began to recover his self-respect.

"I will make a full confession, and to Uncle John."

And he did.

It was about four o'clock when John Martin returned and found Loran in the garden.

"Why, Loran, boy, why are you at home so early, are you

ill? You are working too hard. Sit down over here in the shade while I—”

“No, Uncle John, I am not ill. Come into the summer-house, I want to speak with you.”

“Why, what is the matter, lad?”

Loran did not answer but led the way slow and wearily, and John Martin followed. All the color faded from his cheeks and he trembled violently.

“Could Loran have learned the whole truth?” he questioned himself.

When they entered the summer-house Loran sank down on the seat and buried his face in his hands.

John Martin seated himself by the lad and put his arm

around him.

“Tell Uncle John all about it, Loran. No matter what it is that troubles you, it will be all right, boy. We are alone in the world, Loran, you and I. You belong to me and I belong to you.”

“Uncle John, you will despise me when you have heard my confession.”

“No, Loran, not so bad as that, I——”

John Martin understood. He arose to his feet and looked down upon the young man before him so repentant, so humble, so thoroughly ashamed and so severely chastised. Yes, John Martin understood. Loran had not discovered or learned the truth. Just what he had

done, he did not know, but he was sure the boy had not learned the whole truth, or he would not have thought of confessing his fault to him—instead, he would turn from him with loathing and fear as from a viper. As he looked down upon the boy before him, his own heart sickened with remorse. He touched him lightly on the head and Loran looked up.

“Loran!”

He arose and John Martin folded him to his breast.

“What is it, Loran?”

“And you will not despise me, Uncle John?”

“No, Loran, for I too, have sinned and need forgiveness.”

“I have entered you holy of holies—the ‘best-room.’”

Had a thunderbolt fell in their midst, John Martin would not have been more shocked.

“God!” said John Martin aloud and Loran felt a shiver run through his form, and he knew how greatly he had wounded him.

“I entered the room, Uncle John, but I did not disturb a thing.”

“What did you see that surprised you?”

“Nothing, Uncle John, only the large pictures on the wall, especially the sweet faced woman and the writing on the sheet of music. The name—“Rosemood,” but I knew who that meant. It was my mother.”

John Martin smiled. The light came back into his deep eyes.

“Uncle John, do you forgive me?”

“Yes, Loran, you are forgiven. I was afraid of this the day you asked me about the room and I did wrong to expose you to temptation. I should have shown you the room myself, but you are forgiven,” concluded John Martin as he put his arm around the boy’s shoulder and led him back to the house.

VIII
ON LAKE
WINNEPESAUKEE

SATURDAY was crystal-clear.

A very jewel of a day. Meadis awoke to the sound of the singing of happy birds in the trees, and the fragrance of roses from her garden directly under her window. She arose hastily.

“O, my, what a lovely day! Everything is blue and gold. What fun we will have on the excursion, and it will be my first trip on beautiful Lake Winnepesaukee! But oh dear, I almost wish I had not promised to steal Loran’s secret. I hate to question him about his past history, and I don’t think I will try very hard to make him talk

about it. If it comes right, I may mention it, but I won't fret about it, and anyhow, I don't see why Mr. Smith is so anxious about it. What does it matter to him whether Loran came from the Orphans' Home or where he came from."

She dressed hastily and went down stairs to the kitchen to help her grandmother who had been up long before daylight, had prepared breakfast and had put up a dainty lunch for Meadis & Loran. It was Meadis' first excursion and the old lady was glad that she was going and was anxious to do all she could to help her pretty granddaughter have a good time, so she had arisen a little earlier than usual to do the work that

Meadis had always been in the habit of doing.

“Why, grandma, here you have been up and done all this work while I have been sleeping. Why didn't you call me?”

“Never mind, Meadis, you don't have an outin' very often, but now that we are makin' a little extra money there is no reason why you cant go once in a while if you wish. When I was a girl I never went anywhere, but I want you to go Meadis, and I shall not worry when you are in company with Loran, for he is a perfect gentleman. And now Meadis, I want you to be very careful & not question him about his past life. It 'aint good manners and I 'aint brung you up to ask

questions that don't concern you, and besides, what he has been, is nothin' to us. He is a gentleman in every way, and I want you to show yourself a lady."

"Yes, grandma," but there was a faint guilty color in her cheeks that her grandmother's sharp eye was quick to see.

"Meadis, why do you answer me in that fashion? If I thought you had been pesterin' that boy, I'd—" but she was interrupted by a voice in the garden.

"Meadis, are you ready?"

"Yes, Loran, I will be there soon."

Grandma Bartlett stepped to the door with a hospitable smile.

"Come in, Loran, Meadis has not finished eatin' her break-

fast yet. She will be through in a few minutes. How is uncle John?"

"About the same, Grandma."

Grandma sighed wearily and went on with her work.

It was delightful on the lake. The water was smooth like a mirror and the day was glorious as if it had been made to order, as Loran expressed it. The air was full of warmth and sunshine. Joy and mirth was abound, for merry hearts were everywhere.

They had not more than started when Loran made the remark that how nice it would be if Grandma could have only been able to make the trip, and how she would enjoy it.

"Yes, but grandma is too old

and lame, you know. What a pity though, to think that when she was a girl she could not go anywhere because her folks were so stingy they would not let her spend a penny, and now that there is no one to hinder, she can't go, because she is too old."

"Yes, Meadis, but it is all a part of life. We all try to live, but it seems as though others were determined that we should only have a bare existance in the real game of life. We are shielded from all the storms and know nothing of the hardships until we are thrust out upon the world to shift for ourselves. Our parents mean to be kind, of course, but it is not wholly kindness at that—we ought to be taught to know

what it is and what it means to be brave, by letting us face some of the storms as they come and go. Our lives are a great deal like a sailor brought up on the lakes and then sent to sea with chart and compass and the warning words, 'now remember, I have warned you!' Yes, we have been warned, but hard fought for experience, is what counts in the game of life. It is beautiful to be petted & loved, but the stern lessons of life should not be neglected. No, our parents & guardians do not mean to be unkind, but like a thousand of others, are often in the wrong. Because they say, so and so is right, does not always prove true. It might have been one time during their earlier

days, but it should be remembered that things are not always repeated in this world of Time and Change. But because they are older and wiser than we are, we have to yield to their wishes and plans, no matter how unreasonable they may be. Old folks never want young people to have any fun.

“Uncle John has been awful good to me, but I cannot understand just why we are living such a quiet and secluded life, just like a couple of hermits. I have thought of it over and over, but I don't make any headway. I always come back to the same starting point, and conclusion that he is older and knows what is best for us both. But now that I am almost

twenty-three, it does seem as though he might reveal some of this mystery to me. Why is he always so sad? Why is he forever dreaming? Why does he not let go of the past and enjoy the blessings God is scattering upon him every day? All these things have passed through my mind a thousand times, but what have I gained? What have I profited by my meditation? Nothing."

Loran was sitting a little sideways and looking out over the smooth clear water and Meadis could not see the tears that filled his eyes, but she knew they were there. She saw him brush them aside. Now was her chance, she thought, or at least, she felt she was at liberty to

speak, and why not bring up the desired subject, since he had hinted it.

“Loran, I too, have been looking at it in this same light. You are no longer a child in leading-strings. You have a right to know who you are and where you belong, and from whence you came, and who and what your father and mother were. Do you remember your early days at the Orphans’ Home? I do wish you would tell me about them. Do you know, I have never seen such a place, but grandma has, and she says they have lots of fun there, and it is not one bit like a prison. They have all sorts of games and everything to make life worth the living. How funny

to think I should ever thought it was like a prison! How stupid to imagine such a thing."

She saw the color mount to his fair cheeks and he tapped the deck-railing nervously with his fingers, but she did not see the fire in those dark eyes as she rattled out her questions. He stood it as stoically as he could, until she finished and sat waiting for an answer.

"Meadis, what have I ever done that I should be harassed in this manner, and by you? I thought this was settled a year ago, when I told you frankly that I could not speak of it! Am I to be tormented and tantalized about that which can be of no interest to others? Once more and for the last time, I

tell you I can not tell you what you ask! Please let that be sufficient."

A faint mocking smile played upon her pretty face, and she was bound and determined not to be baffled so easily. Why is it we are so often unkind to those we love and who love us in return?

She touched him lightly on the arm.

"But why? You speak of the chains that are about you, and that they were planned and placed upon you by one whom you call your uncle John. You speak of being free, and here you are twenty-three years of age and still this John Martin is your keeper. What is the reason you dare not speak for

yourself?"

"Meadis, it is not necessary to lie, nor is it necessary for me to make excuses or try to put you off. I simply will not discuss the subject! That is final. I am not angry with you, but I cannot tell you."

"But why?" she persisted.

"Because I don't wish to."

"That is no reason, whatever," she said coldly.

"It will have to be sufficient at least for the present," he answered.

The demon within her was stirring and try as she might, she could not control her temper.

"I was a fool to come on the excursion, today. I didn't want to, anyhow."

"You said you did."

“Yes, I said I did, simply to please you.”

“But, Meadis—”

“That’s all right. You go on talking about your troubles and of being in chains, and if I try to sympathize with you or ask a question, “the fat’s in the fire” and you turn upon me like a half-wild indian.”

“But—”

“I don’t believe you ever saw the doors of an Orphans’ Home and more than that, Mr. Smith don’t, either.”

At this, he arose and faced her.

“So this Mr. Smith is somewhat interested in my affairs, is he? Well, I thought so, from the beginning.”

She saw her mistake quickly

and tried to retrieve it.

“He and grandma were talking about it the other evening and—”

He interrupted.

“Meadis, is this true? Look at me! Is this true?”

She hesitated a moment.

“Don’t you believe me?”

“Answer my question!”

“Yes.”

“Meadis, I will now answer you. No! I do not believe you.”

She arose.

He looked at her in silence with his hands in his pockets. Their eyes met in one swift glance. She turned away. Still he watched her. After a few moments she looked over her shoulder, and his eyes were still upon her, not unkindly, but in

pity and Love's unspeakable grief. Her lips began to quiver and she burst into tears. He did not move or speak but still kept his eyes fixed upon her.

By and by, she grew calmer and dried her tears. Relief and repentance had come with weeping. O, how often it comes to us one and all. We get nettled and provoked and the evil that is within, overpowers our weaker facilities and we rebel, not willfully exactly, but instantly—being over-burdened. But then, everything that is done in hate or deception, has to be done over again, because there is no other way to make a wrong, right.

She went back to him shamefacedly and stood there in silence for a moment with bowed head.

By and by, she raised her tear-stained face to him.

“Loran, Loran, forgive me! It was a lie. He bribed me to do it. He—oh what am I saying. I mean—”

“Meadis, compose yourself. I am not angry with you, dear. We will drop the subject.”

But there was something in her breast that would not let her remain silent. She felt that she must speak, and yet she dared not, for she remembered her oath. She had sworn to assist John Smith, and there was a bond that she felt she dared not break.

“Dear Lord,” she moaned under her breath. “Loran, he—” she almost screamed.

“Meadis, what is the matter?”

he said taking her trembling hands within his own. "Be brave, little girl—I do not mind. I understand it all. John Smith has made you his slave and he has silenced your lips by making you promise to remain his silent partner. For him, you promised to inquire into my private affairs & he holds you silent. Perhaps he has sworn you on the Bible. Is that it? Surely you are at liberty to answer that much, and if that is the case, I can help you. Is it, dearest?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I did not misjudge him the day I met you with him on the way to the store. Now listen.

"You have foresworn yourself to keep secret things not at the

time made known to you, and that is a sin to be repented of. You have already done that. You have acknowledged your sin and you wish to atone. Am I right, Meadis?"

"Yes."

"In the fifth chapter of the Book of Leviticus, the 4th verse, of your Bible, (I quote from your Protestant Bible for I am of the Catholic faith, you know) it reads:

'If a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty of one of these.

(5) And it shall be, when he is guilty of one

of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing.'

“And if you want an example and from one who committed a sin under such an oath, I would refer you to the margin of these same verses, which will refer you to Mark: 6. 22.

‘And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I wilt give it thee.

(23) And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.

(24) And she went forth and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

(25) And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and saked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by on a charger the head of John the Baptist.

(26) And the king was exceeding sorry, yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not refuse her.'

“And so he made himself a murderer, simply because he would not break his oath, which was a sin. Meadis, always remember, we are at liberty at all times to repent if we only will. Any wrong, may be

repented of, and we can be forgiven. No one need remain under a cloud of darkness. The Master is just and kind, when we are ready to atone.

“Yes,” said Meadis softly, with the sweet breath of summer in her face, and the joy of forgiveness filling her soul, “we can all be forgiven.”

IX

A TROUBLED HEART

LORAN came home weary and perplexed from the trials he had passed through during his excursion on the lake. He had gone away in the morning with a light heart and pleasant anticipation of the day, and had come back in a melancholy mood. But it was nothing new to Loran, since nearly all his days had been far from happy ones, and he had been with John Martin so long, he seemed to share all his weariness and sorrow, too. Loran tried hard enough to be brave, but there are moments when it does seem that to rebel, is a relief, a sort of outlet for the overcharged soul.

John Martin was sitting in the doorway reading & did not notice Loran until he was near the steps.

“Well, Loran, did you have a good time?”

“Yes, and no. Say, Uncle John, who is John Smith?”

“John Smith—why, boy, I never heard of the man.”

“I mean the man stopping at Grandma Bartlett’s,” said Loran nervously fumbling with his watch chain. “Don’t you remember, he stopped here the evening he arrived at the Corners, a month or six weeks ago. You were at the gate when he came and inquired the way to Oakley Esden’s office?”

“Yes, I do remember somebody inquiring the way, but I did

not pay very much attention to him more than to direct him where he wanted to go. I don't think I have ever seen him since; if I have, I did not know him. Anyhow, I never knew a John Smith in my life. Why do you ask me, Loran, and why are you so worried?"

"O, nothing, in particular," he replied sullenly.

But John Martin knew better. While he did not know what was troubling Loran this time, he was sure something had gone wrong, and he must find out what it was. He could stand any amount of pain, himself, but when things went wrong with Loran, it was different and harder to bear than his own burdens.

He arose, stepped to the boy, turned him around and looked him in the face.

“Loran, tell me about this John Smith, this new comer to the Corners. Has he been annoying you?”

“No, not exactly that. Not directly, but he seems to be mightily interested about my affairs, and he has been trying to hire Meadis to find out if I really did come from the Orphans’ Home.”

John Martin smiled.

“What does Meadis know about it?”

“Nothing.”

“And this John Smith is getting interested?”

“Yes.”

“Has he been talking this to

Grandma Bartlett?"

"No."

"I thought so." John Martin brightened up. "Grandma is the one woman in the world to be trusted."

"So Grandma knows all."

"I did not say so, did I?"

"Uncle John, how long must we, you and I, keep up this sort of life?"

John Martin shook his head as if to say he did not know. He dropped Loran's hand and began to pick the dead leaves from a rose-bush near by, but Loran was not so easily put off.

"Why do we have to live alone and so different from other folks? Why are we the laughing stocks of the whole town? I am sick and tired of

such a life, and I for one, wish I was out of it!"

"Loran!"

"I can't help it, Uncle John."

"Are you tired of staying with me, Loran?"

"No, but—"

"Then try and be patient. Wherever you go, you will find that you will have crosses to bear, and things will not always turn out as you would like to have them, but you will also learn that all things come to those who wait."

He turned abruptly and went into the house.

Loran watched him & realized that he was as much in the dark as before he commenced to discuss the matter with him. It was always the same.

John Martin entered his "den" and closing the door, sank into the nearest chair and began to dream his eternal dreams.

"Who is this John Smith? I must look into the matter at once. I will go over to Grandma Bartlett's and see him. No, perhaps I had better send for Grandma to come here," he muttered to himself as he took a small picture from a box hidden in his desk, and looked upon the face of a youth of about eighteen. A bold and a handsome boy as was ever born into a world of woe. The face was fair and frank, & unmarred by the malignant of deceit, or selfishness, but oh, what will not the years do. John Martin studied the pictured face for a

long time and the tears ran down his pale cheeks. In the years gone by, he had loved this boy, and even now, it was hard to bury his memory. He had tried to, but he found it was impossible. This boy in the picture had played traitor, but in spite of all the misery he had caused, John Martin loved him.

It has well been said, that it is an impossibility for a love that is pure, to die. It may, for a time become cold & indifferent, for many of the storms in life are severe, and while they may in their fury and madness overpower love, if it is genuine, some day it must be resurrected again, for it is the Flower of Heaven, born of God, and can not die.

Loran rapped at the door.

“Are you going to bed, Uncle John?”

“Yes, Loran, I will come soon.”

After one more look at the picture of the boy who had played him false, John Martin returned it to its secret hiding place and went to bed.

He was soon fast asleep, and while he slept, he dreamed.

He walked along the shore of a quiet and peaceful river and met there, his boyhood's friend, George Castle. Not the George Castle he had known, but a man apparently young in form and face, but gray with the grief and remorse of a sin that had haunted him all his days. As John Martin looked upon him,

there was nothing but pity and forgiveness in his heart and he went to him with hands outstretched in welcome, but his friend of the past years only shook his head.

“No, John Martin. the years have tempered me to every grief, and your belated forgiveness comes too late. As you see me now, so will I live and die.”

“But you disappeared and I never knew what became of you.”

“Did you try to find me?” asked the strange young, old man.

“No,” replied Martin, meekly.

“I thought so.”

The stranger sighed wearily, a sigh that ended in a sob like one under a great sorrow of the

unmerciful years that had been as eternal winter to his sad and darkened soul.

O, it struck deep into John Martin's heart, and for a moment he could not speak. And when he did, it was in his own selfish defence.

O, God! when will men learn to put self aside? When will they cease to crucify and wonder at their own sorrow—their unspeakable loneliness?

"You remember, George, you played traitor, and—"

"Yes, oh yes, I remember," he interrupted, "lay them on, John, I can bear the stripes. We all are punished by our sins. I presume you, have not escaped."

There was a mirthless laugh from lips that had long since lost

the ecstasy of youth's musical laughter.

But even that, did not stay the hand that held the lash, for John Martin went on, seemingly untouched with divine pity.

"Yes, you played traitor and I have not forgiven you."

"Exactly. Than you would not have forgiven me if you had known of my whereabouts. Your own words, John Martin, verify the truth!"

"Yes, I understand."

It was his friend's turn with the lash now. Where no mercy is shown, no mercy can be expected. "Ye shall reap as ye have sown."

"John Martin, you know as well as I, that what I did, was the mad desire of a jealous

nature, & you knew that nature well, for we had been companions together for years, and might have been still, had not a woman come between us. Yet, you have gone through life unmarried, and so have I. You have not known what real happiness is since we both left home years & years ago; neither have I. We both have drank from the cup of wormwood and myrrh. The years have been many, John Martin, but we have both lived. You returned and have been surrounded with all that is good and beautiful with one to love and pity you and try to bring back again at least part of the sunshine into your darkened life, but as for me, I have been groping

blindly as one in the dark, but I have lived and prospered. I did not seek riches, God knows I did not, but they came to me. I only prayed for life and would have been thankful for that, and should have been even if I had only been granted a bare and small hard-earned existence here among my fellow-men, but the Master has seen fit to give me riches. Perhaps He so richly blessed me because I was wretched and thankful for life alone; because I have borne my cross as penance for my sin, and have not rebelled. John Martin how has it been with you all these years?"

John Martin bowed his head. When he raised it again, another vision was before him.

He saw a field of daisies and coming slowly toward him, was a mother with a baby boy in her arms. He stretched out his arms to receive them, but she stopped him with a wave of her hand.

“John Martin, I loved you, I trusted you, but you would not listen because my faith was not your faith. You admired my beauty and that was all, but because you have been kind, I love you still.”

“Rosa, I was blind, I had a father and mother and they hated your religious faith, forgetting that in doing so, they were condemning their own; but they were my parents nevertheless, & I yielded to their wishes. But I have never loved another,

so sincerely as I have loved you. If you knew all—I mean if you could have understood you would never have doubted me. You have suffered and so have I, Rosa.”

“John Martin, why did you go away as you did? Your lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. You loved another, and because your boyhood’s companion rebuked you, you cast him off forever! He has been a wanderer through life, & so have you. God has weighted the balance well. You both have reaped what you have sown. Yet, I love and pity you, and in the near future, God will say to the angel holding the scroll of Destiny in his hand, ‘Enough! These two are Pardoned.’”

John Martin awoke. The sun was shining brightly in the room and he arose pale and haggard and went down stairs. Loran had prepared breakfast & they ate in silence as usual. After the meal was over, John Martin placed his hand gently upon Loran's.

"Loran, I am not well and I wish you would go and get Grandma. Tell her I am ill and ask her to come immediately."

"Isn't there anything I can do, Uncle John? Only let me help you."

"There is nothing I want, Loran, but I must see Grandma at once."

"Very well, I will go and get her."

After he had gone, John

Martin paced the floor, a prey of agonizing memories.

“O, God, why can not I be kind? Why am I so miserable? Teach me how to do at least one little act of kindness before the end comes. Why am I so hard, so unforgiving!”

Grandma Bartlett was not long in getting to the home of John Martin. Lame as she was, love and kindness lent speed and strength to her tottering and feeble limbs, for she had loved John Martin ever since he was a baby. She had been his adviser through life and he still looked to her as a child weary and tired of its play turns to its mother. How strange it is that we never realize that we are grown-ups. We always look

to mother for everything and we always find our wants and needs fulfilled in her great love for us. We receive much and give little in return.

“Say, Grandma, who is John Smith?” he said as soon as she entered the door.

“What?” she exclaimed in surprise.

“Who is John Smith?”

“Why, bless your heart, I don't know any more about him than the man in the moon. He came to us and wanted to get boarded for the summer. He said he was sick and wanted to get out of the city. Why?”

“Well, he seems to be anxious to learn who Loran is and where he came from.”

“Well, I presume he has heard

it talked of, at the store, John."

"Grandma, did you know he had been questioning Meadis?"

"No!" snapped Grandma, her keen eyes flashing, "but suppose he has, John, Meadis knows no more about your affairs than the chickens out in the coop! What can she know? I have not breathed a word to her or anyone else. I have learned her to keep her mouth shut and not talk about things she don't know anythin' about. You wait until I get home, I'll teach her a lesson she won't forget in a hurry."

"No, Grandma, Meadis is no longer a child. She is a woman and you must be reasonable with her, and besides, you say you have not told her anything,

so don't you see, she has done nothing wrong. Smith is the guilty one and you must talk with him. Who do you think he is?"

"I don't know."

"Well I do."

"Who!"

"George Castle."

"George Castle!"

"Yes, Grandma I saw him last night in a dream and I am sure."

Quick as a flash, Grandma remembered that he did have a slight resemblance to John's boyhood's friend, young George Castle, and she too, was now sure it was he.

"John, I believe you're right. I thought his eyes looked somewhat bright for a man who

seemed to be near the seventy-odd. You just wait 'till I get home—if he's that good-for-nothing George Castle, I'll strip him of his fine feathers, now you mark what I say. So he has dared to come back and show himself here at the Corners among honest people? You wait, he will get a piece of my mind."

She was fairly boiling with excitement.

"Is there anything I can do for you, John?"

"No, Grandma. I only wanted to see you about this affair. I hope it will come out all right in the end."

"Yes, my boy, it will."

"I hope so."

"It will, John, leave it to grandma."

He looked up and smiled with satisfaction, and to Grandma, that was her reward.

“John, you have been livin’ too long in the shadow, and somethin’ seems to keep tellin’ me over and over this beautiful mornin’ that all is goin’ to be roses and sunshine, by and by.”

“I hope so Grandma, for a little while, at least.”

“Yes,” said the kind old lady, “we have all had enough of the storm. Now, if there is nothing I can do, I will be goin’.”

“Grandma you are more kind than I deserve, and it is not right for you to be forever sacrificing your time on me, and I have been selfish to allow it all these years. but I have been so miserable—”

“Stop, John, we must make the most of what the good Lord has given us that is beautiful. Now go out into the garden and live among the roses John, and don't worry over what the future may disclose.”

“Yes, Grandma.”

“John, what are you dreamin' about, now?”

“Loran. The boy is having a hard time of it, but he is every inch a man. Someday, I must tell him the truth.”

“Yes, John, you must. The boy is bein' pestered to death and it is a wicked shame.”

“Unto the third and forth generation,” said John Martin to himself as he went out into the garden as Grandma had suggested.

Grandma washed the breakfast dishes, tidied up the room a bit, and then went home.

She found John Smith on the doorstep, and without a word of warning she yanked the false wig and beard from his face and head. He arose and faced her pale and trembling.

“So it is you, George Castle!”

He did not answer.

“Well, I am waitin’ for a reply—an explanation!”

“Grandma, I have no apologies to offer. I came back because I could not keep away any longer. I heard that John was dead and I returned to see at least his grave. I have sinned Grandma, but God knows that my punishment has been greater than my sin. I have paid the

penalty ten-fold. Have you no kindly word of welcome for me Grandma? Have you no pity?"

The spirit of the Master stood before her.

"Inasmuch—"

"Yes, George, my boy, I do pity you,—but hurry & replace your disguise for here comes Meadis up the road and she must not know, at present. I will have a talk with you to-night."

He hastened to obey and stepped aside for her to enter the house.

X

AT FATHER RODNEY'S PARISH

FATHER Rodney lived in a pretty vine-clad cottage at the Corners. He too, was a great lover of flowers and his garden like John Martin's, was radiant and redolent with blossoms. He loved them, and this might have been the reason that they grew so profusely, for it has been said if you want flowers, you must love them. You may give them all they need of care and rich soil, you may tend them and water them, and they may grow and bloom, but there is an ineffable something that will be missing in their beauty and grace if you

do not love them. A something that can not be expressed in words. Everything, under the sun needs love, and love in abundance to keep it in the light & the glory of the world.

On this particular Sunday morning, Father Rodney was in his garden when Loran called.

“Good morning, Loran, come and sit here in the shade of my favorite roses. They were never so beautiful before. How is Uncle John?”

“It is about him that I have come to see you this morning, Father Rodney. How much longer am I to live under this scandle that broods over my existance? I am no longer a child, and now that I am of age and past my twenty-first

birthday, I can't see why, I have not a right to know who I am. Why must I be ridiculed simply because someone else has sinned and come short of the glory that they might have had, had they been a little more kind and righteous? I have been called a pauper from the Orphans' Home and made the fool of the village all my life, because someone else has done something the people can not solve, and I have been obliged to remain silent, simply to shield this someone else. It seems to me that others should be made to bear their own burdens and not shift them off on others to carry, for God knows that every one has a sufficient amount of burdens to bear, and I don't believe God

intends that we should ever be weighted beyond our strength with the cares of others."

"My son, have you not learned that it is noble to bear the burdens of others, and does not the Book teach us to bear one anothers burdens?"

"Yes, as far as love and sympathy goes."

"Are we not also to help them mentally and morally as well as physically through life?"

"We are not to make our own lives miserable and deprive ourselves of all the glory that God is trying to scatter upon us, and we are also told in the same chapter from which you quote, that every one shall bear his own burdens."

"Then you call the Word a

contradiction?"

"No, I believe it is a book of common sense and it must be used with the same respect. We are to help others bear their burdens, and as I have already said, we do when we love and sympathize with them, but I don't believe God ever intended that any of His children should carry the sins of others to shield them, and I think that is what He meant when he said, 'everyone must bear his own burden.' I believe in love and kindness and I am sure, without boasting, that no one here at the Corners can say that I have not lived a holy and virtuous life."

"You are right, Loran," said the priest. "I have known you all your days, and I have never

heard one unkind sentence against you, only a curious and mistaken remark as to who you were and where you came from. Some have said you came from the Home, and to all these remarks, John Martin has made no reply, so they have taken it for granted and giveu it out as a fact, but you have been brave and although you have fought the silent battles within your own heart, somehow, now that you have reached manhood, you find the battle harder & harber, and you will find it even harder, my son, as you grow older. You have come this morning to ask my advice and I can only say that I would advise you to keep it up a little longer. Be brave Loran and rich shall be your

reward. We never lose when we sacrifice our own inclinations for others. I know just how you feel and how vainly some of the Scriptures appeal to you, but when the proper time comes when you need them the most, the things that were so dark and meaningless, will unfold and fill you with a far greater joy than these roses, that are truly the sweetest things God has created next to a human soul. Sometimes we almost doubt the Scriptures when we read that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but there are times in our lives when we can see and know that the Word is the truth. There are times when certain passages seem dark and meaningless, and again, they are as

a lamp of light to our dark souls. Loran, do you not understand?"

Loran did not speak.

"My son, look up!" said the priest sternly but not unkindly.

"There, now I can talk to you. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength. My strength cometh from the Lord,' said the psalmist. He meant by that, that when we let the sunlight shine into our faces we feel its warmth and it helps us to take courage; he meant that when people go with their heads bowed towards the ground where the things of gloom are, always downward, we can not make them understand, but when we can look into their faces, we can

talk to them and console them; he meant that Heaven is above and Hell is below. This is why we lift our faces to the light when we pray; this is why all nature is so very beautiful to us—because we look up to it. The child walking through the field and woodland with its mother, says 'I don't see anything wonderful in nature!' 'Look up, my child,' says the mother, and the child looks up, & claps his hands with delight. 'O, how beautiful!' and he runs about laughing, trying to catch gay butterflies darting hither & thither in their play."

Loran moved uneasily in his seat and bending forward began to caress a dwafsted aster that grew at his feet.

“Father Rodney, this little flower illustrates just about the state of my soul this morning.”

“Loran, whatever is the matter with you? I never saw you in such spirits before. You have always been an obedient boy with the same sweet nature of your dear mother. Has someone been talking to you in hopes of discouraging you in life?”

“That is about all I have been getting. Father Rodney, will you answer one question?”

“Yes, if I can.”

“Who is John Smith?”

“I do not know, Loran. I have heard of him as a new-comer at the Corners. but I have never met him. Why do you ask?”

“He is boarding at Grandma

Bartlett's and he is the strangest man you ever saw. Ever since I first saw him, I have had a strange dislike for him. Why, I can not tell, and only a few days ago he tried to bribe Meadis to aid him in finding out my past history."

"And did she succeed?"

"No."

"And how do you know he tried to bribe her?"

"She confessed it to me yesterday while we were on the excursion. I told Uncle John about it & he seemed disturbed although he told me frankly that he did not know anyone by that name."

"And you doubt his word, Loran?"

"No, Father Rodney, I believe

Uncle John. I would trust him with my life.

“Then, Loran, if your faith is so sure in your Uncle John, why can not you be patient to bear and forbear a little longer? I am sure he will make things plain by and by. The darkest sky must turn to azure sometime—we could not stand it always and it isn’t God’s way.”

“But, Father Rodney, do you know what is troubling him?”

“Loran, I am not at liberty to speak. You must wait—there is no other way!”

Loran sat looking out across the rose-garden and his thoughts seemed to be far away in his childhood days. The kind-hearted priest pitied the boy to the depths of his heart, but

according to his Church, he could not betray the confession of another. He took from his pocket a thin volume of poems and after turning the pages carefully, he said:

“Loran, listen while I read a little poem that has been a world of help to me. Perhaps it may help you.

‘I know not what befalls
me!
God hangs a mist o’er my
eyes;
And o’er each step of my
onward path,
He makes new scenes
to rise.
And every joy He sends
me,
Is a sweet and glad
surprise.

'I see not a step before
me
As I tread the days
of the year,
But the Past is still in
God's keeping;
The Future His mercy
will clear,
And what looks dark
in the distance,
May brighten as I draw
near.

'For perhaps the dreaded
Future,
Is less bitter than I
think;
The Lord will sweeten
the water
Before I stoop
to drink;
But if Marah must be
Marah,
He will stand beside
the brink.

'It may be there is
 waiting
The coming of my
 feet,
Some gift of such blessed
 glory,
Some joy so strangely
 sweet,
That my lips can only
 tremble
With the thanks I cannot
 speak.

'O, restful, blissful,
 ignorance!
'Tis blessed not to
 know;
It keeps me quiet in those
 arms
That will not let me
 go,
And hushes my soul to
 slumber,
On the breast that loves
 me so.

‘So I go on not know-
ing;
I would not if I
might;
I would rather walk in
the dark with God,
Than go alone in the
light;
I would rather walk with
Him by faith,
Than go alone by
sight.

‘My heart shrinks from the
trials
The Future may dis-
close,
Yet I never had a
sorrow
But what the dear Lord
chose;
So I send back the
coming tears,
With the whispered words,
He knows.’ ”

When the priest finished reading, Loran turned his head and smiled.

“Thank you, Father Rodney, I will do as you say—I will wait a little longer. You have led me out into the sunlight.”

The priest smiled.

“I knew you would listen to reason, Loran, and I promise I will see your Uncle John and talk with him in regard to the matter. There is always a way out of every difficulty. It may not be just as we might choose, but after all, it always works for the best, and in after years, quite often, we see it in the right light. It is possible my son, for us to master every conflict, and all we need, is a brave heart.”

“Yes, Father, but it isn’t always so easy to govern one’s self when they have been under a great trial nearly all of their days.”

“But, Loran, you have done it this morning.”

“Yes, through your help.”

“Certainly. Bearing burdens with each other.”

Loran left the priest in the garden smiling sweetly. Father Rodney had changed him body and soul. This is the reward for doing a kind act in the spirit of the Master—the joy that comes through the consciousness of having done it.

XI
TELLING LORAN

UNCLE John, what do you think of matrimony?"

They were sitting together in the garden for it had been an extremely hot day and the cool, fragrant breath of the growing things in the dewy eventide was refreshing.

John Martin looked up somewhat surprised out of the mood of taciturn gloom that usually enveloped him, and yet it was hardly a surprise, though it had come so unexpectedly at this time.

"So the time has really come, Loran. Well, I am glad of it. Meadis is a good girl and she is the one I would like to have

you marry."

"Yes, Uncle John, we are going to be married in October," said Loran proudly.

"What does Grandma say about it?"

"She is agreeable if you are."

John Martin was silent for some moments. His mind was far away, as usual, but his moody melancholy soon left him, and he turned once more to Loran.

"Now my boy, I am going to tell you something. Something that you have been waiting to know for two or three years. You may turn from me, you may dispise me, yet I must speak. You will be going from my home by and by and I must make things straight first."

It was a heavy task that lay before John Martin, for he did not know just how Loran would take it, and he dreaded to speak, fearing that the child who was and always had been the pride of his heart would turn from him in fear and loathing as from a deadly serpent. For the time, John Martin felt like digging his own grave with his bare hands, jumping in and pulling the dirt in upon him—something as a murderer must feel when he hears his sentence read telling the hour when he must walk to the gallows. The evening was warm and sultry, although a gentle breeze was blowing from the west across the meadows, but to him, it seemed like the fiery breath of

a dragon; the cold sweat stood out upon him and he trembled in every limb.

Loran reached out and touched his hand sympathetically. It was cold as death.

“Uncle John, are you ill?”

John Martin did not answer this question. He did not seem to hear; he was thinking deeply — thinking how to commence the story that he had rehearsed so many times, knowing that someday it must be told.

He moved slightly toward Loran as if for support and commenced.

“Loran, in the big brick house on Main street, there lived many years ago, a family by the name of Greenfield, Frank Greenfield and his wife. They were honest,

hard-working people and deeply in love with each other, but they had not been blessed with the laughter of little children to brighten their home that seemed to set right in the middle of the Garden of Eden and lacked only the sunshine of a child's presence to make it an earthly paradise. So they went to the Orphans' Home and took for adoption a boy by the name of George Castle. (Thus Satan entered their Eden.) I do not mean that it is a sin to adopt children, God forbid, but they had new cares and troubles to disturb their dreams of life and joy. George was a handsome boy and they loved him as if he had been their own flesh and blood."

As John Martin continued, he leaned his head upon his hand in such a way as to shade his countenance from the boy's eyes, and spoke in low husky tones, that broke here and there with suppressed emotion.

“He had been in their home but a few days when I met him, and we became fast friends at once. Where I went, George went, and what I did, he did. We were always together, and this close friendship continued for many years. One day, George and I attended an auction some ten or twelve miles from here in a little settlement of French people, and while there, I fell madly in love with a pretty French girl. I was young and at that time any pretty girl

would turn my head. After that, I used to go and see her every Saturday & return home Sunday evening. I kept this up for nearly two years before my parents got hold of it. George knew about it, but he was true as steel to me and knew how to keep his mouth shut; but somehow, my father got "wind" of the affair and tried to break it up, but it was too late; we had been secretly married and I was the father of a fine baby boy. When my father learned of this, he was bitter against us both, my wife and myself, and also George Castle for keeping the secret, but when learned that no one knew of this secret marriage but Grandma Bartlett and George Castle and Father

Rodney, and that they would not reveal it, he was easier about it and gave me money to support my boy. I was but eighteen years of age and the pride of my mother's heart. She never knew my secret, not even to the day of her death. My father was a trader and dealer in horses and she was led to believe that it was business that took me away nearly every Saturday and Sunday.

“Both my father and mother were bitterly prejudiced against the French people and the Catholic faith, and had my mother known that I was a husband and father in a French family, she would have died long before her time. Father and I kept this secret for two

years, but it was beginning to be irksome, so George and I planned to go to Pennsylvania. We heard that there was a canning factory at Johnstown where hands were wanted, so we wrote to the company and obtained positions. My young wife was nearly heart-broken, but I promised I would help her and I was good as my word for I sent her money every week. But while I was there, I fell in love with another, a beautiful girl by the name of Rosemond Merritt. When George learned of this he was like a maniac. He had always been of a jealous nature, and fearing he would lose me, he began to do all he could to break up our courtship, and he succeeded

when we had gone so far as to think of getting married. He went to Rosemond's father one day and told him of my secret marriage and that I was the father of a child. Rosemond qusetioned me about it and of course I had to admit it, but I tried to explain how my marriage had been only a boyish fancy and that we had not really lived together. I told her that there were things that I could not explain satisfactorily just then, but would make it all right in time. Thus the hour of our parting came, and we both promised to be true until death, and I have never broken my word and I am sure she is just as loyal. I told her I would come or send for her when I

was free. When I returned to my boarding place, I found a note on the table written by George Castle, saying that he was going south and that I would never see him again. I was so angry at the time, I did not care and I prayed that I might never look upon his face again, and I never have, to this day.

“Well, I stayed in Johnstown a year, then I returned home as mother was not well & wanted me. I returned alone. Everyone of course wanted to know what had happened to George Castle and why we had seperated, all to which I made no reply, except to say that he had gone south but I did not know exactly where, which was the truth. A

few days after I returned home, Lawyer Esden received a letter from George, postmarked Jacksonville, Florida, and stating that he was in business and doing well. Esden wrote to him but the letter was returned. Several others wrote but received no answer. Time went by and Frank Greenfield and his wife died without ever knowing what had become of their adopted son. So much for all the love and kindness they had shown for him. O, well, I suppose it is of the world, but he might at least have written to them & sent them a few dollars now and then.

“Two years later, my mother died, and just six months to the day, my father followed her,

and I was left alone. I could have gone to my wife, but I would not. No, I was so embittered with George Castle, everything and everycne was dead to me, and so I lived alone. I often thought of the one I loved in far-off Pennsylvania, and I am not ashamed to say I wept. Always I prayed that the time might come when I could claim her for my own and be happy again, but my prayers were not answered—I suppose it was not to be. I had sinned, and must live out my days in punishment until I could learn how to be kind and forgiving to those who have been unjust to me; until I could see my own faults and short-comings as quickly as I

could see them in others.

“Yes, I understand it all, now, Loran. I was still living under the shadow of a great sin and I knew that deep down in the depth of my heart I was as bad, yes, worse than George Castle had ever thought of being, for it was I in the first place that committed an almost unpardonable sin, and then drew him into it by holding him to a promise to remain silent; then when he maddened me by letting the secret out, I cast him off forever.”

Here John Martin broke down and sobbed, but Loran went to him, took his thin cold hand in strong warm ones and calmness returned to his storm-beaten soul and with it, renewed strength,

so he went on with his story.

“Yes, Loran, I prayed day and night and I wept, but there was no God to hear my prayer. I too, was an outcast and in my own home-town. Can you wonder why I have been dull and dreamy all these years, boy? Can you wonder that I know of no blessedness, save in you, lad?”

For a few moments there was a stillness, and to John Martin it was like the stillness of death. He turned to Loran and looked him straight in the face.

“O, Loran, have you never guessed?” he questioned.

“Guessed what, Uncle John?”

John Martin lowered his eyes and spoke almost in a whisper like one who had been severely

chastised & was now repentant.

“Loran, I am your father.”

“My father!”

“Yes ”

The young man dropped the hand he had been caressing and arose to his feet. He was pale as death. He staggared like a drunken man. The floor undulated beneath his feet. In all his dreams he had never dreampt of this. Loran had always thought of John Martin as a well-to-do acquaintance of his mother, who had taken him in, out of pity & kindness.

John Martin caught his hand and held to it as a drowning man grasps the hand of his rescuer.

“Loran, for God’s sake listen until I am through. I didn’t

want to tell you this, God knows I didn't, but you were bound to know it some day and I had rather you would hear it from me, than from another. You must listen Loran, you shall! I will never let you go until I have finished!"

"Go on," said Loran hoarsely.

"Loran, you are all I have in the world. Yes, boy, you are more to me than Rosemond! I swear it. You are my own flesh and blood. I was afraid to tell you this Loran—I was afraid I would lose you, but what else could I do? Listen Loran."

"I am listening."

"Loran," pleaded John Martin softly, beseechingly.

That pleading voice, broken with bitter tears, humble with

penitence, shattered the barriers of Loran's anger, and throwing his arms about his father's neck he wept with him.

"Loran?"

"Yes, dad."

"Thanks, my boy, thanks, Loran."

After a moment, John Martin went on with his story.

"You were about ten years old when your mother wrote to me. She was dying of consumption. I went to her and she begged me to take you home with me and bring you up, and I consented, for as my parents were both gone, I could do it safely, and I was lonely and wanted someone to love and cheer me up, if such a thing could be possible. Surely, you

remember some of this, Loran.” The boy nodded his head and John Martin went on. “I urged you not to mention this to anyone—where you came from, no matter what they might say or think, and I believe you have done as I told you. I have never known you to disobey me in anything, Loran.”

“Only the day I entered the ‘best room,’ dad.”

“No, Loran. You confessed that, and I forgave you. Always remember that when we forgive, it should be forgotten, but if remembered, never to be mentioned or referred to again. Otherwise, it would not be a righteous pardon—forgiven.”

Loran did not speak but he nodded in approval.

“You understand now, Loran, why I have let them believe you came from the Orphans’ Home. Of course you knew better, boy, but you would not disobey me, or add to my great unhappiness. Of course I might have brought you here openly as my son, but that would have entailed explanations, and the whole miserable story would have had to come out, & every right-thinking man would have despised me as a poltroon and a coward. I treated your mother badly, I contemplated doing Rosemond the greatest wrong a man can do a woman, and I drove my best friend from me in unreasonable anger. So I have had to bear my cross in anguished silence, and have not

even dared to acknowledge you as my boy. O, God, how some of us have to suffer in life for our sins and dire mistakes! I have made you suffer, too, Loran, and you are innocent. That was a deadly sin, the deadliest of all."

Again John Martin choked with sobs.

"Uncle John—Father!"

Still John Martin struggled with his grief until it mastered him, and the strong man wept like a child.

Loran had once more governed himself—mastered his rebelling pride that had been tempered and tried so many times by the fires of Hell, but through his great love and kindness he had come out victorious with his

colors flying and a happy and contented heart.

“Dad, I never guessed this, not even when I saw the three portraits on the wall in the sitting-room, the “best room.” Tell me all about it, dad. Nothing can separate us now. We have lived & loved each other so long it must continue now to the end. I am and always will be your boy.”

John Martin drew him to his breast and whispered: “This is Heaven enough for me, dear Lord!”

He felt the cleansing, forgiving power in his soul and was satisfied.

In a few moments, Loran spoke of Rosemond.

“Dad, have you ever heard

from Miss. Merritt?"

"No, Loran, not directly, but through a friend. Her parents are dead and she is living in Easton with an aunt."

"Why don't you send for her, dad, as you promised?"

"No, Loran, not now. I am not well, and I don't want to burden her with an old sorrow, now that I can not go to her. The weight of her burden has been lifted and now that she is happy perhaps it is best that we should never meet again," he said softly as he brushed aside a tear that was about to fall.

Then, with Loran to lean upon, he walked through the garden, and as he went, he breathed a prayer of thanks that his confession had been, and his boy

still loved him. His fondest prayer had been answered. He smiled through his tears, the first smile in all the years of secret sorrow, and it seemed to his enraptured eyes that the flower-faces nodding along the trim walks smiled back at him in sympathy and understanding.

XII
LORAN WRITES TO
ROSEMOND

THE next morning Loran arose at five o'clock as usual to help get the housework out of the way so that Uncle John, or his father, as he was now to call him, would not have so much to do. Loran was a great favorite among the hands at the mill, or had been, until within a week when some of the help began to call him the Orphan. Why they had begun to annoy him in this way he could not understand, and it worried him a great deal, perhaps more, because he could not see any reason for their new-born animosity.

“Well,” he soliloquized, “I can now speak out my mind and clear myself of that nickname. At last, I can vindicate my name and clear it of this scandle that has been growing all these years—but perhaps I had better wait a little and let Uncle—I mean father do it. Gee but I’ll have a time learning to say father, after all these years.” He was adjusting his tie before the mirror & was much surprised to see the change that had come over him. “Gee, I believe I am growing back! I look like a seventeen-year-old boy.”

He hurried his simple toilet and went down to the kitchen, and was surprised at not finding his father there. He went out to the garden and looked about

with some anxiety, and not finding him, returned to the house and rapped at John Martin's door.

"Loran, come in."

"Dad, are you ill?"

"I guess I am a little under the weather, Loran, and when you go to work I wish you would stop and tell Grandma to come over."

"Sure, dad."

"You don't know how happy I am to hear you call me dad, Loran. It seems like the twilight of my life had come, and God has made it glorious. And here I have been worrying half my life away dreading the time when I would have to tell you the truth; when I would have to explain the whole miserable

farce again! God, how I have suffered," he cried as he buried his face in his hands.

The sun shone warm into the room and it was the beginning of another perfect day. A day of roses and sunshine, full of song and gladness and more than enough to out-weigh all the sorrow and sadness. God has made it so. A bird in the rose-bush under the window sang his sweetest carol and it seemed to quicken John Martin's soul. Loran smiled as he listened and when the bird had flown, he spoke in answer to his father's words.

"That's just it, dad. That is why life is so miserable to the most of us. We spend too much time in worry and anxiety. We

fret over things that never happen, cross bridges before we come to them, and dread to climb mountains that are only ordinary hills when we get to them. We torture ourselves too severely, sometimes. God meant that we should be happy but we are not willing to abide by His natural laws, the laws of nature, and instead of trying to enjoy what each day brings of blue skies and sunshine, we look into the future and try to see things that don't exist. Only today, is intended for us to know, the future is not for our hands to fashion, and we should learn to wait and enjoy and be thankful for what we have. Surely, the Master knows how much we can bear."

“Yes,” said John Martin thoughtfully.

Loran seated himself on the edge of the bed & took the hot feverish hands within his own and a dreadful fear crept into his soul. He feared his dad was going to be seriously ill—that he had found a father only to lose him.

“Dad, don’t you want me to stay at home today?”

“No, Loran, I will be all right soon. Grandma will doctor me up again and we will talk over our future days—your happy days, Loran. Keep a brave heart, lad. The morning may be more beautiful, yet!”

“All right dad, I will stop and tell Grandma to come over as soon as she can.”

He hastened his breakfast and was soon on his way with a troubled heart. He loved John Martin and he was afraid of this threatened illness. For a time, Loran forgot his words in regard to the Future that morning. Quite an easy thing to do.

He found Grandma & Meadis at breakfast.

“Come right in Loran and have some breakfast.”

“Thank you, Grandma, but I have had my breakfast,” he said as he entered and sank into a chair near the door throwing his hat on the floor.

“But pray, child, what brings you here in such haste? You are all out of breath and it is a quarter of seven—time you were at the mill.”

“Yes, Grandma, but father is ill and he wanted me to call and ask you to come over this morning.”

“What?”

“Father is ill and he wants you to come over—”

“Who?” she interrupted, feeling quite sure that her ears had deceived her.

“O, I forgot, Grandma. He has told me all about it. There is no secret between us, now. He told me last evening.”

“Well, I’m glad of it.”

“Yes, Grandma, he told me, all.

“My—but I’m glad John Smith didn’t happen to be here at the breakfast table—now Meadis, you see if you can keep your mouth shut. I almost wish

you had been out of the room when Loran came in, but you are a woman now and I hope you will remember your place. Yes, as I was sayin', I'm glad John Smith didn't happen to be here at the table. It 'aint very often he does sot down with us to breakfast, but it is a wonder he 'aint 'round when somethin' is goin' on that he hadn't ought to know. But we must speak low for his room is directly over the kitchen and he might hear after all.

“Well, I'm glad John told you, Loran, but he was waitin' 'till you saw fit to merry, he told me so. He said that before you left him, he should tell you all about it. But if I were in your place, Loran, I don't believe I

would mention it at the mill this mornin'. Better wait a little and let him tell it first."

"Yes, Grandma, I was thinking that that would be the best way, but I must be going. Now you will go over, won't you Grandma?"

"Yes, Loran, I will go just as soon as I can get my things on. Don't worry, I will take good care of him."

"I won't. Good-bye—good-bye Meadis. Say Meadis, I will see you this evening, sometime, but perhaps you had better come over to the house as I will have to stay with dad, you know."

"All right, good-bye," said Meadis as she went to the door and watched him out of sight.

"Meadis Bartlett," said Grand-

ma sharply, "how many times have I told you never to watch any one out of sight."

"Why?"

"Because, it's unlucky, that's why!"

Meadis laughed but said nothing as she went about with her work.

When Loran went home to dinner he did not find John Martin any better, and when night came, he was worse—he had a light fever.

"Loran, I think we had better call a doctor," said Grandma as she began to put on her things.

"Do you think it is anything serious, Grandma?"

"Not now, but there's no knowin' what may set in, and we had better be on the safe

side. It don't pay to run too much risk.

So the doctor was called. And he came again in the morning, but would not say very much about the case.

As Loran stood watching his father as he lay with his eyes closed, a new thought entered his mind.

"I know what I will do. I will send for dad's sweetheart. It will do him more good than all the medicine the doctor can give him."

So he sat down and wrote, and for the time being, put self aside, and wrote to Rosemond Merritt as a stranger writes for another. It was a letter that told a story of love, a love that had never grown cold.

Friends come and go, but not so with love, for the love that is born of God can never die.

Here is his letter.

“Dear Miss. Merritt:

My father lies at Death’s door, stricken with what I fear is brain-fever, though I am not sure, as the doctor will not say just what it is, but I am sure you are wanted.

John Martin never loved but one woman and that was you. He married my mother when he was a mere boy—a boyish fancy which he afterward regretted, but what could he do? His parents were very bitter toward the French and their religion and he was obliged to keep his marriage a secret. He married my mother wholly

for my sake, his child. You have been told that he had several children, but this was false; it was told you by a jealous companion.

John Martin's parents are dead and so is my mother. Mother died when I was about ten years old, and since then, I have lived here with dad; we have been chums together, dad and I, but it was only a few days ago that I learned the secret from his own lips, or I should have written to you before. He has told me all. Won't you come? We need you. We have always needed you.

I am enclosing a check for your expenses. Please come. My father has waited all these

long weary years—and so have you. It has been a noble love. Come.

Sincerely,
Loran Martin.”

The next morning the doctor stated that John Martin had brain-fever and that he must have a trained nurse, so he brought one from the hospital at Laconia that evening. The patient continued to grow worse, and two days later he became delirious.

Loran sat beside the bed holding his hot hand, when he suddenly began to call for one many miles away.

“Rosemond, Rosemond, dear Rosemond, won't you come to me now? I am so tired. I have

climbed and climbed but the
the mountain is so steep and I
am so weak and exhausted—I
can go no farther. Please come
Rosemond—please. Mother, won't
you plead with her. Mother!
Mother!

The tears ran down the boy's
cheeks as he gently touched his
father's burning brow.

Instantly John Martin opened
his eyes. The light was dim
with the soft purple rays of
twilight and he did not see
clearly who was at his side.

“Nurse,” he whispered with
a faint smile, “that was like
the touch of my mother's hand.”

Loran bathed the throbbing
temples with his soft, cool hand
and by and by the sufferer fell
into a deep sleep.

Loran arose and went into the next room where Grandma and Meadis sat. While they were talking together in subdued tones a light rap sounded on the door and Loran opened it. A boy with a telegram stood on the step.

Hastily tearing open the envelope he read the few words.

"Yours received. Will come at once.

Rosemond Merritt."

He read it again to make sure there was no mistake, then his eyes sparkled with delight.

"O, Grandma, she's coming!"

"Who?"

"Miss. Merritt, dad's sweetheart, who he has been waiting for all these years."

A kindly light lit up Grand-

ma's eyes and a sweet expression lit up her handsome old face like the sunshine that breaks through the clouds after a long storm. Her apple-red cheeks crinkled into a smile.

"This is some more of George Castle's work," she said softly to herself, and yet aloud, but not loud enough for Loran or Meadis to hear. "Poor fellow, he has a kind heart, after all. How he must have suffered all these years."

The tears gleamed like jewels in her eyes and ran down her faded and wrinkled cheeks.

"What, tears, Grandma, and arn't you glad she is coming?"

"Yes, Loran, of course I am glad she is comin'. These are only the tears of joy. Sure, I

am glad she is comin'!" and she brushed them aside with her apron. "The "best room" must be opened and aired and everythin' dusted and put in apple-pie order as he would have it."

A new light beamed in Loran's large bright eyes.

"Now I understand why dad had this room and the bedroom adjoining renovated only this last spring. He was preparing for the coming of his bride."

"Yes, Loran, you have guessed right. I told him some time ago that you & Meadis were plannin' on gettin' married in the fall, so he began to get busy. Now in the mornin' we will drop everythin' and attend to this work for she will be here in two or three days and there is

not a moment to lose. The nurse will take care of your father. That it is what she is hired for. Now if you will put on your hat and go home with us, I think Meadis & I will be goin'."

Loran caught the little old lady in his arms and kissed her again and again. After telling the nurse he would not be gone more than half an hour, the three started out for the house of the "singing bottle."

XIII

ARGUMENTS

GRANDMA Bartlett & George Castle were in the pleasant sitting-room in the house of the "singing bottle," The day had been warm, but the evening was cool and refreshing. Grandma was finishing some sheets and pillow slips to give Meadis as a wedding present, and George Castle was writing some business letters. Grandma was sitting near the window where she could see any one who might enter the yard.

"It was good of you George to send for Miss. Merritt," said Grandma looking over her glasses to see how he took it, for she felt that he must be surprised

to find out that she knew it.

He was, somewhat surprised, but he was clever enough to conceal it.

“So she is coming,” he replied keeping his eyes on his writing.

“Yes, Loran expects her here by Thursday noon and he is goin’ to Lakeport to meet her. I am so glad she is comin’. The doctor says the fever will turn by Thursday or Friday and he thinks if she can only be where John can see her, it will save his life. I hope and pray she will get here in time and she ought to if she starts at once and that is what she said in her letter, but we often make such promises when we really do not do just what we say—she may not have thought of starting

until today or tomorrow. And Loran, poor boy, is so anxious he has not shut his eyes for three nights, he is nearly heart-broken."

She waited a minute to give him a chance to speak but he kept on with his letters.

"George, when they are married, why don't you go and ask their forgiveness and straighten up this tangle of trouble?"

He dropped his pen and faced her pale and trembling.

"Mrs. Bartlett I have done nothing to ask forgiveness for. I told nothing but the truth. My tongue is not a crooked one as you suppose! I simply warned Miss. Merritt, by telling her that John Martin was already married and that he had a child

and that both wife and child were living. John Martin told her the same story the next day. I am no deeper in the mire than he is, and you know it. I admit that I was a coward to run away, but like him, I have returned. Has he ever told the people here at the Corners his secret?—No! neither have I. He has kept it most carefully hidden from them, he has worn a mask—so have I with my disguise which I have been obliged to wear to shield him. Would you have me remove it and tell them the whole story? No! Then be careful of your judgement. I have come back to help make things straight again if such a thing is possible, but not to ask forgiveness, for I have not

wronged anyone. I simply warned an innocent girl. I broke my promise and I was a coward to run away as I have already stated, and if I had it all to live over again and know what I know now, I would stay and face it, because we gain nothing by running away from trouble. Yes, Mrs. Bartlett I have sinned but I have never driven a poor innocent girl to her grave heart-broken simply because she was French and not of my religion. Religion—Bah! It is a mighty poor religion that can not stand every form of worship. And right here, perhaps it would not be out of place to speak a kind word in behalf of the dead; I mean John Martin's wife. Rosa Levering was a saint; a dove in

the clutches of a handsome youth who admired her beauty; a child in a kennel of wolf-hounds in the guise of Christians who were fairly lolling for her sweet crimson blood. She became a mother and died with all the love of motherhood in her innocent soul. She loved John Martin and she died for him, and no greater love can we have than this. And because she loved him, she remained silent with a bleeding heart. How many wives would have done this?"

"She was not fit to be his wife, George Castle!"

"Then by the God who is the founder of your faith, where is Christianity? If she was good enough to be the mother of his

child, she was good enough to be his wife!"

Grandma was silent and he went on.

"She was a Christian and she lived it out in the faith that was taught her from childhood, & if there are saints in Paradise, I am sure Rosa Levering is there. She is dead, and being dead, she lives in the soul of her child. Can you dispute that? No! It is the truth and you know it. Now I will return to John Martin and myself. You look upon him as Abel and upon me as Cain. Why is it that I am damned and John Martin goes scot-free? He came back and was wise enough to keep his mouth shut—so was I, but instead of coming back I

went away and settled down in business and became rich, but I would give every penny of it to buy back my friendship with John Martin, though I will never crawl in the dust to him, nor beg his forgiveness, and that is final, Mrs. Bartlett, and you can tell him so. I intend to stay here long enough to see Meadis and Loran married and then I shall return to the South for the rest of my days."

"But George, John thinks you lied about him."

"I know he does, but I didn't. I only told the truth. Satan was called the Father of Lies when he told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that they would not die if they partook of the Tree of Knowledge—"

“But,” interrupted Grandma,
“the Lord told them they would,
didn’t He?”

“Yes, but did they?”

“Well—yes, they died spirit-
ually.”

“Yes, but they thought He
meant physically.”

“Well the Lord is not to
blame for what they thought.”

“Perhaps not, but it was
deceiving them, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” she slowly answered
searching her memory for some-
thing to quote in defense.

“Well, we call deceiving,
another word for lying.”

“Well, didn’t Satan deceive
them, too?”

“Yes.”

“Well—”

“Well, what have you gained?”

Is one any worse than the other? Isn't this a fine illustration of the affair that sunders John Martin and myself? Mrs. Bartlett, John Martin would have married this Merritt girl in spite of Heaven or Hell, had I not spoken and put an end to it all. The Lord told Adam and Eve one thing and meant another. They did not fully understand and Satan tried to explain by telling them they would not die, but be like God knowing Good from Evil, which they did. That was not lying, it was explaining."

"Yes, but they didn't know Good from Evil."

"That's just it, but there had to be a sense of knowledge, didn't there, even as it is with a little child."

“But they shouldn’t have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge after they had been warned.”

“Wait, a moment, please. Now WHAT IS the Tree of Knowledge? Be reasonable.”

Suddenly a new light beamed in the old lady’s eyes. The glory of a new thought had blossomed for her.

“O, I see! the understandin’ of things. The light of reason!”

“Exactly.”

She did not say any more, but busied herself with her sewing and George Castle once more returned to his letters. By and by she looked out into the garden as she heard the click of the gate-latch and saw Meadis and Loran enter the yard.

She hurried her work into her

sleeping room just off the sitting-room, and warned George.

“Quick, George, here comes Meadis and Loran.”

He donned his disguise but not a moment too soon, when they stepped into the room.

“Good evening, Grandma and, Mr. Smith,” said Loran.

“Good evening, Loran,” said George Castle in return, as he arose and went into the garden. Somehow, he felt that his room would be more appreciated than his company. And he was right.

He was not hardly out of the room when Grandma turned to Loran with a whisper:

“Who is with your father?”

“The nurse is there and I told her I would come right back as soon as I came home with

Meadis. I did not like to have her come alone, and besides, I have something I should have told you before, perhaps. It was I, who sent for Miss. Merritt, and not dad. I tried to get him to write to her but he thought he hadn't better after all these years, so when I saw this coming illness I sat down and wrote to her and—"

"You! why, I thought it—" she checked herself.

"You thought it was who?" questioned Loran.

"No matter who I thought," laughed Grandma throwing her arms around his neck and kiss-him on the cheek, a ruse to throw him off the the track which worked splendidly.

George Castle watched them

from the garden with a sarcastical smile on his thin lips.

"The kiss of Judas," he said to himself, mockingly.

"Well," said Loran "I must hurry back for it is getting dark and the nurse is alone.

After he had gone, Meadis lit the lamp and busied herself in the kitchen. George Castle once more returned to the sitting-room and took up his writing with Grandma at the window watching him and trembling with rage and indignation.

"George Castle, why didn't you tell me that you didn't write the letter to Miss. Merritt?"

"Because you didn't ask. How did you think I knew what you were driving at?" he said without looking up from his

writing. "Besides I was so busy with my letters I didn't pay much attention to what you were saying."

"Well, you should have said somethin' when you found that I was talkin' about somethin' that didn't concern you!" she snapped, mad through and through.

"But it did, concern me Mrs. Bartlett," he said, the color rising to his temples. "I don't know why I am barred from everything that is going on, as though I had committed some hideous crime! I have done wrong—John Martin has done wrong, and I presume you have done wrong too, at least sometime in your life! Everyone has done wrong, yet everyone turns from me as though I was a

viper! You seem to be in deadly fear that I may learn something in regard to John. When I left the room only a few moment ago, you whispered to ask Loran who was with John Martin!"

"How do you know?"

"I heard it clear out in the garden."

"George Castle!"

"It's the truth. You were excited & you whispered louder than you intended. You remember the window was open and I was not more than ten feet from you."

"Well, go on," she said drumming nervously on the window-sill.

"Everyone in this town thinks that Loran came from the Orphan's Home, and if you are

so bent on the truth and know it, why don't you come out and explain and shield the boy from the scandale that hangs to him."

She was silent.

"He is Rosa Levering's child and John Martin is his father!"

"I know it."

"Yes, but why do you seem to be so anxious to to keep it from the town's people?"

"Because it's none of their business," she snapped, the fire flashing in her sharp eyes. "You know the reason, George Castle. He did not want it to get to his mother, so we kept it as quiet as possible."

"Yes, that was the reason years ago, but John Martin's parents have been dead ten or twelve years, and there can be

no just reason for making that boy suffer because his father had made a fool of himself in his younger days. It is, and always has been a mystery to me to understand how such pious people can keep up their faith in Heaven as a hereafter, and be filled with such deviltry. By the gods! if John Martin don't unfurl his colors pretty soon, I'll do it for him. I am getting mighty sick of this damnable farce."

"Had it concerned anyone, I presume I should have told them," commenced Grandma thoughtfully, "and had I known you to be George Castle instead of John Smith, I should have told you everythin' when you first came home. You should

have revealed yourself to me before, George."

"Tonight, John Smith will pass out of this life forever, and in the morning George Castle will be at the Corners again."

"But what about Meadis and Loran?"

"What does it matter? They will have to know sometime."

"Yes, George, but you know we had planned to give them a grand surprise on their wedding-day. And you have kept it from them so long, please wait a little longer, besides, John is seriously ill. Wait, at least until he recovers," she said tenderly as she arose from where she had been sitting by the window and went over to him. "I am sorry George, that I spoke as sharply

as I did, but I was provoked. I thought it was you, who had wrote the letter and when Loran told me it was himself who did it, I was mortified almost to death. George, I have not fully understood you until tonight. You are as dear to me as John is. My poor motherless boys, how you both have suffered!"

He arose and folded her to his breast.

"Yes, Grandma, you have been a mother to us both, and kinder than we ever deserved. We have both sinned, John and I, and have been sufficiently punished, and I trust we shall soon come out into the sunshine again and once more be happy. And until the clouds have all passed, I will keep in the dark.

I have been walking blindly so long, a few days or weeks will not matter much, but tell me, Grandma, does John know who I am?"

"Yes."

"Who told him?"

"Nobody, he guessed it."

The joy of understanding and of being understood flooded his darkened soul like the golden dawn of a summer day.

He smiled.

XIV

ROSEMOND ARRIVES

THURSDAY morning Loran went to the livery-stable and secured the best team they had; he then drove to Lakeport to meet Rosemond Merritt who was due on the noon train.

He reached the station just as the train was coming in and he watched the passengers as they emerged from the cars.

"I shall know her," he said to himself as he got down by the carriage.

Rosemond stepped from the parlor car and saw him standing by his carriage watching the merry crowd of passengers, and knew it was Loran. He did not see her until she touched him

lightly on the arm.

“You are Loran?” she inquired.

“Yes, pardon me,” he replied tipping his hat. “I thought I should recognize you first,” with a smile.

Something in that handsome young face, touched her soul. Was it the likeness of John Martin? No, he did not look like his father, though of course there was a resemblance, and he had a beauty all his own, a grace and air of breeding that appealed to women.

Before she realized what she was doing, she had kissed him full on the lips.

“I am so glad to see you, my dear, you are the image of your father, as I first saw him in the years gone by, but of course he

has changed, yet he is the same—" she checked herself and brushed aside the tears that misted her eyes.

"Am I in time?" she inquired as she stepped into the carriage.

"Yes, the doctor says the fever will not turn before evening and I am so glad you are here for he has been calling for you constantly. He has been dreadful ill, but we hope your coming will bring him back to health again."

"Whom will I meet at the house, Loran?"

"Grandma Bartlett will be there—"

"Who?" she interrupted.

Loran laughed.

"I forgot. You see, we call her grandma because she has always

known dad and really I have never known any other grandma; and she is grandma to everyone at the Corners."

"O, I see; she is not a grandma by relation."

"No," he replied with a smile, "only by affection. You will also meet Meadis, my bride-to-be in one short month."

"Then we are going to lose you, Loran. I hoped you would be with us always."

"And so I will. Meadis and I will live only a few steps away, and we shall be back and forth every day or so, we shall be neighborly, I assure you, for I could not think of leaving dad."

"And now, tell me of your father. Has he been well of late? You know I have not

heard of him in years," she said her voice dropping to a whisper.

"Yes, father has been well up to within a week or two ago, when he began to sort of pine away in spirit. I think he knew of this coming illness, Miss. Merritt, for he has had a hard time to keep up, and when he learned that Meadis and I was to be married soon, he just broke down, and told me the whole story. It was a shock to me, for I had never known or heard one syllable that would lead me to suspect such a thing. The next day he was stricken with fever. We did not think much of it at first, but as he began to grow worse, we commenced to fear for his life, and

when he began to call for you, I was glad I wrote to you the day before. Dad had told me of you when he was telling me the story of his past life, or I would not have known where to reach you. O, what a grand surprise it will be for him! It will be like the opening of Heaven to his weary heart, Miss. Merritt."

Miss. Merritt was silent and the tears gleamed in her eyes. Her thoughts went back over the years when she and John Martin had been so happy in dear old Johnstown, the home of her birth. Her mother was living then, and she too, had learned to love John Martin with all a mother's love, and before she died, said to Rose-

mond, "be patient dear, for someday he will send for you." Now that the time had come, sweet with so much of love and remembrance, she seemed to live it all over again. The lavender of memory is always sweet, but now, it was like balm to her tired heart. How changed things were. The years had passed; the summers had come & gone; the roses had blossomed and died, and still she had waited and loved and suffered, and all because two men had sinned a foolish sin.

And now after twenty years, John Martin was to claim his promised bride. Does it pay to wait? Yes, for the love that can endure & wait for fulfilment as patiently & blindly as Rose-

mond had waited and loved, must be genuine, and such a love is richly rewarded.

“The years have been long,” said Rosemond, “but God has been good to us, and now we shall be happy together the rest of our days.” She opened a locket suspended by a slender gold chain and revealed two tiny portraits.

“Tell me Loran, do you know who these two people are?”

A look of surprise passed over his face as he looked upon the pictures from which the crayons in the “best room” had been made.

“Why, one is dad and the other is George Castle, dad’s chum who went to Pennsylvania with him more than twenty

years ago. George Castle disappeared and has not been seen or heard of since."

When they reached the house Grandma and Meadis were at the gate to receive them.

"My dear, I am glad to welcome you home," said the kind old lady with outstretched arms and Rosemond went to her embrace as a child weary and tired of its play goes to its mother.

Rosemond had craved the shelter of a mother's love, many years. Aunt Hannah was good to her in many ways but she did not possess that gentle loving spirit that one craves for when weary and heart-sick and sad. But in Grandma Bartlett she knew at once she had found all

she needed, for Grandma had been a mother to motherless children all the days of her life and gloried in having everyone call her grandma. When anyone was worried or troubled, they found in her a haven of rest until the storm of adversity or sorrow had passed and they could once more bear the light of day. She was certainly all they could ask for as a sympathizer and a practical friend.

“Come in, dear, you must be tired to death. I have a nice cup of tea and a little lunch for you,” said Grandma leading the way into the house.

As they entered the dining-room the doctor came out of John Martin’s room.

“Is this the lady you were

expecting, Mrs. Bartlett?" he inquired.

"Yes, doctor, this is Miss. Merritt from Pennsylvania."

The doctor bowed.

"If you will come into the room now, Miss. Merritt, I think Mr. Martin will know you."

Rosemond did not stop to remove her hat, but stripped the gloves hastily from her hands, threw back her veil and followed the doctor into the room with Grandma and Meadis behind her. John Martin lay rolling his head this way and that in agony, his face drawn and unshaven, yet to Rosemond, he was the handsome lover of olden days. She went to him and placed her hand upon his forehead. Slowly, but surely he

became easier and quieter.

“John, dear, don’t you know me? It is Rosemond. John, John,” she cried as she threw herself upon the bed and clasped him in both arms. “John, I have come to you!”

Slowly he opened his eyes. A smile crept over his face, and he weakly tried to fold her to his breast and kiss her pleading tear stained face. She bent down until her lips touched his in a kiss divine.

“Rosemond, can it be you after so many years, or have I died and gone to Heaven?”

“John, it is Heaven enough to be together once again, isn’t it?”

“Yes, dear, it is enough,” he whispered faintly.

He sank into a drowsy state, half sleeping and half waking, & Rosemond became frightened, fearing that he was dead. She began to talk and call loudly to him.

“John, John! O, God, I have killed him.”

“Wait a moment, Miss. Merritt. He is not dead, but exhausted. John Martin will live.” It was the doctor’s soothing voice that calmed her agitation, & glorified her soul with hope.

XV
ROSEMOND AND JOHN
MARTIN

THREE weeks passed and John Martin was convalescing rapidly under the gentle care of Rosemond and Loran. He was a new man. Indeed God had performed another miracle. All his dreamy self-absorption & moody melancholy had gone forever, and life and love had done wonderful things for him. Every day when it was warm and sunny Loran wheeled him in the invalid-chair into the garden and Rosemond would take her sewing and they would sit and talk of the happy, sunny days yet to be. The days that were so full and rich with promises of happiness.

“Rosemond, it doesn't seem that we had been married nearly three weeks, does it.”

“No, John, but we have, and I am so happy.”

“I am glad, Rosemond, but I was afraid it was never meant for us to meet again.”

“Why?”

“Because the best part of life is gone.”

“No, John. Today, and the others that are to follow are the best. We must not think of the past, but look forward with a glad heart to the rich possibilities that lie before us. We have much to be thankful for, yet, my dear.”

“Yes, and Loran, I am glad that it is as it is, for his sake. He is yet young and he too, is

filled with this great happiness that comes into life like the sunshine in the wake of a terrible storm."

"And he ought to be, with such a charming little creature as Meadis."

"You are right, Rosemond."

"John, do you know where George Castle is?"

"Why, yes, my dear, he is here at the Corners."

"Why, Loran told me—"

"Neither Meadis nor Loran knows of this, Rosemond. He is here under the assumed name of John Smith and is living at Grandma's under a disguise. No one but Grandma and you and I, Rosemond, know of this, but on the evening of Loran's and Meadis' wedding day, George is

going to reveal himself, and we are invited to be present. I dread this meeting somehow, after so many years, but I will have to face it someday, and I suppose one day is as good as another."

"Yes, John, and we must forgive him."

"Forgive him! My dear, there is nothing to forgive. We have sinned & we have been punished. We all make mistakes and we must be willing to forgive them in others if we ever expect to have our own forgiven. It is the only way, Rosemond. The heart that knows how to overlook errors in others, is the one that knows what real happiness is, but for many of us, it takes years to see this truth in the

true light. It has taken me more than twenty years, and even now I find it is indeed a road to Gethsemane."

"John, you are right. When we can feel sorry for others that have harmed us, it is then we forgive, but it must be gratis—without the asking."

"Yes, Rosemond, that is the idea and we must try and live it out the rest of our days."

"So you see dear, the best days are yet before us—the happy days are yet to come. We have lived, but how? We have not been happy unless it was in the dreams of the future when we should be together. We have been blest even in the midst of our sorrow, for God scatters the sunlight upon the evil and the

good, and we have had the flowers and the songs of happy birds and we have had many things to be really thankful for; I am sure that when we learn the great lesson, to be kind and gentle & to overlook the sorrowful mistakes in others that have perhaps bitterly marred our own happiness, we shall know that this, is the real Garden of Eden and that we are living in the very midst of the glories of Paradise."

She slipped her hand in his as she continued.

"We have been punished for all that we have done that was evil, and I believe we have been rewarded likewise for the good we have done, and I am sure that our greatest happiness

is the consciousness of knowing we have done what is right.”

A bird perched in the top of a near-by apple-tree began to sing, and to them, it was the sweetest song they had ever heard. They sat and listened & dreamed as one does who has entered his holy of holies to pray and meditate and try to solve some of the problems of life that are constantly unfolding before him.

Loran entered the gate and when he saw the two, he removed his hat and stood and listened, too. Neither his father nor Rosemond had noticed him, so after a few moments he turned back and entered the house by the side door, while the bird sang on in the top of the old apple-tree.

“Dear old dad,” he said to himself as the door closed behind him, “he has once more found his heart.”

Loran went to his room and took from his treasure box his mother’s picture and rosary. He studied the face long, and the tears came into his eyes.

“Mother, I have kept the faith. I am still your boy, and God is with me.” He kissed it as he had done many times before, ever since she had died and gone away. He placed it back carefully and took up the rosary, crossed himself and said his beads—his prayers.

He then went back down stairs as he remembered he had a letter for Rosemond that he

had taken from the office on his way home from the mill. He went into the garden and gave it to her.

“O, thank you Loran.”

He smiled.

“John, it is a letter from aunt Hannah.”

“Loran,” said John Martin, “while Rosemond is reading her letter you may wheel me into the house if you will.”

“Yes, dad.”

“You need not leave on my account, John.”

“I know it, dear,” he replied with a smile and a wave of his hand.

Rosemond opened the letter eagerly and read its contents. But the roses in her cheeks faded a little as she read, and

she was glad that John and Loran had gone into the house.

This is what she read.

“Dear Rosemond:

I have missed you so much these days, and I am afraid the flowers have too, for I have been so lame, I have not been able to attend to them as you used to, and I am sure that the “shut-ins” miss you, too.

Dear, I have bad news to write. Milton Ashbury is dead. He was found dead in one of the mines up in Alaska, stabbed through the heart. His parents are heart-broken.

The body is being sent home.

Well, dear, I am glad you

and John are married and that he is on the road to health and happiness again. I know you are happy and so I am happy, too.

Maybe I can come and see you next summer, if you want me to. Good-bye.

Your loving aunt

Hannah."

For some moments Rosemond sat with the letter in her lap & her eyes cast down in deep thought. It was all so sudden.

"Milton Ashbury is dead," she whispered, "and so there is nothing to fret about, now. I was afraid he might come here and John would learn how he had been making love to me. His parents, I am sorry for them, but I suppose it was so to

be. God knows what is best."

She gathered up her sewing and went into the house. Her new-made husband noticed her pallor.

"Bad news, Rosemond?"

She smiled faintly.

"Yes, a friend of aunties' has passed away. He leaves a father and mother and many friends to mourn him."

"And you, my Rosemond—wasn't he a friend to you, too? Don't be afraid to speak your heart, my dear. I know he was never your lover—not that, for you were made in Paradise for me. He may have longed for your caresses—he may have hoped to win you, but it was impossible, you—"

"Don't John," she cried as

she sank to his feet and hid her face in his lap and wept.

“Then I was right?”

“Yes, John, he was my friend, but never a lover. I never loved but one, and that was John Martin.

He was silent.

“John, do you doubt me?”

“No, Rosemond, I believe all you say. We were made for each other in Paradise. else we would not have waited all these years. This Milton Ashbury was your friend, and we must never fail to pay our respect to friendship, it is too rare a gift, Rosemond.”

Loran was up stairs singing. The blood chilled in her heart. It was Milton Ashbury's favorite hymn. Where did Loran learn it.

He was of the Catholic faith.
Sweet and clear the words came
sweeping over her soul.

“Swift to its close ebbs
out life’s little day,
Earth’s joys grow dim,
its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all
around I see,
O, Thou who changeth not,
abide with me.”

“John, where did Loran learn
that hymn?”

“Up at Grandma’s. Meadis
and Loran sing together
beautifully.”

XVI

LORAN'S FAITH

WHAT, married by a Catholic priest?" said Rosemond when she learned of Loran's marriage arrangements.

"Yes, Rosemond, Loran has been brought up in the faith, and I have never interfered. He was with his mother until he was about ten years of age, and she brought him up as any mother would, in the faith she herself had been taught."

"But he is your child, too, isn't he, John?"

"Yes, he is my boy and I love him, and because I love him, I have never interfered with his religious ideas. I will not try to draw him away from

the mother who bore him and reared him to the best of her knowledge. He is my boy, but he is his mother's boy, too."

"But can't you see—"

"Rosemond, I tell you I shall never meddle with Loran's affairs. He is no longer a boy. He is a man and capable of managing his own affairs, and I think too much of him to interfere with his religious belief now. So please let the matter drop!"

"John, I did not mean to be unkind, but I spoke as I thought. Yes, Loran is a good boy, and I love him too, and I hope some-day to hear him call me mother."

"Rosemond, don't! Don't try, I beseech you. I know you mean well, my dear, but you

do not understand. Loran has always been deeply attached to his mother & no one could for an instant take her place with him. I would not consent to your trying. We must be contented to love him as he is, and be grateful for what measure of love he can give in return. Listen while I read to you a little poem—The Stepmother.

“The marriage rites were
over,
And though I turned
aside
To keep the guests from
seeing
The tears I could not
hide,
I wreathed my face in
smiling,
And led my little

brother,
To greet my father's
chosen,
But I could not call her
mother.

“She was a fair young
creature,
With meek and gentle
air,
With blue eyes soft and
loving,
And silken sunny
hair.

I know my father gives
her
The love he bore
another,
But if she were an
angel,
I could not call her
mother.

“They’ve borne my mother’s
picture
From its accustomed
place,
And hung beside my
father,
A younger, fairer
face.

They’ve made her dear old
chamber,
The boudoir of
another,
But I will not forget
thee,
My dear, my angel
mother.

“My father in the
sunshine
Of happy days to
come,
May half forget the

shadow
That darkened our dear
home.
his heart no more is
lonely,
But I and little
brother
Must still be orphan
children,
God gives us but one
mother."

"I trust you understand me
now, Rosemond."

"Yes," she said softly.

"This is the way Loran looks
at our marriage and he is making
a brave heart of it, and we
must respect and cherish the
sacred memory that burns like a
living fire on the altar of his
heart. The poem is not the full
meaning of my life, Rosemond,

God forbid, it could not be. What is gone is gone, but one can not forget. Even Time will not allow that. I confess dear, that Rosa was never to me what you are and what you have been all these years—she could not be, Rosemond, else I would not have waited for you all this while. It was a boyish fancy, but she was Loran's mother and I would not be human if I did not love my boy. Don't misunderstand me, listen. If Rosa had been dearer than you are to me, I should never have gone to Pennsylvania & we would not have known each other, you and I. I have never really loved but one woman, Rosemond, and that is you. I recited the poem simply that you might under-

stand how tenderly and passionately Loran cherishes the memory of his mother, and after seeing the real depth of his devotion, I am sure you would not care to take it from him, were it possible."

"No, John, and I admire his loyalty, for I too know what it is to cherish the memory of a mother, but I did not know just how it was with Loran. Yes, it must be as you say, we must be satisfied with what measure of love he can give us. And in regard to his religion, it is the same. I shall endeavor to try and keep him faithful in the faith, rather than to teach him another."

"I am glad you understand, Rosemond, and I am sure we

shall all be very happy together. It doesn't make so much difference what one's religion is, so long as he or she is kind and gentle and patient and has learned to bear and forbear, for there are many creeds & beliefs, and there is a large amount of good in them all, yet it would be impossible for anyone to accept them all, and as we each have different views of the acceptance of things, I think we each should be left to make our own individual choice."

"Yes, dear, but you know there has always been a great difference in regard to the Catholic faith."

"Among the Protestants, yes. They do not agree with the Catholics, no, and how can they

when they can not agree among themselves? We have a fine priest here, Rosemond, and he is doing much for the benefit of the people, and he has a large number of friends even among the Protestants, too."

"I know," replied Rosemond, thoughtfully, "but—"

"Only this morning—pardon me for interrupting."

"Go on," she smiled.

"Only this morning, Oakley Esden, our town lawyer called to tell me that he did not approve of the marriage between Loran and Meadis by a priest. But why? I inquired. Loran belongs to Father Rodney's church, and why should he not be married there? He then went on to say that I ought to put

a stop to such doings I laughed at him and told him Loran was of age and had the right to act as he pleased, and that I should not step between him so long as he was manly and upright and true."

"What did he say, John?"

"O, I don't recall all that he said, but he went away muttering something about my being a disgrace to the town and the country and the like. But what's the use of listening to such men when they are not one half as good as the ones they are talking about. Such folks are of little worth, my dear."

"Who is this Oakley Esden, John?"

"He is the big dog of the

place—I mean the great man of the town. What he doesn't know isn't worth knowing, and what he doesn't approve of, is punk. He is very rich rumor says, and what rumor don't know in a country village is, as Toots says 'of no consequence.' He is a justice of the peace and known as the squire. He is supposed to be a very honest and reliable man, to whom you could lend your money without taking note or receipt, only don't lend your money that way. He is a member of one of the—Protestant churches. So you see, my dear, that the Protestants are not all living up to the standard, either."

XVII

THE WEDDING

THE fifteenth of October was a glorious golden day; the wedding day of Meadis and Loran. Everything was in readiness and Meadis looked charming in her new gown that Grandma had given her as one of her wedding gifts. She wore an exquisite cameo on her bosom—one that her own mother had worn on her wedding day, seemingly, only a few years before. Grandma had found it among her daughter's possessions in the attic, the day before. "This will be the most fitting for the occasion and will go well with the low-neck gown. Someday I will give Meadis the rest

of the things," she said kindly as she looked upon a faded picture of a young man and woman in the bloom of life.

At the home of John Martin, everything was much the same. Loran came down to breakfast smiling as usual. John Martin met him in the hall.

"So today I am going to lose my boy."

"No, dad, I shall still be your boy. I shall be here at home with you much of the time and help with the farming just as I have always done. We are chums for life, dad, you and I. Aren't you glad with me, dad?"

"Yes, Loran, I am always glad when you are happy," said John Martin as he took from his vest-

pocket a slender band of gold. "Loran here is your mother's wedding-ring. She gave it to me before she died; the day I took you home with me. You remember, don't you?"

Loran nodded. He could not speak; his heart was too full. He took the ring and looked upon it reverently.

"Mother."

Tears were in his eyes, and John Martin drew him to his breast and brushed back his thick dark hair.

"No tears today, Loran. It is your wedding day. We must not dream of the past any more. We have had enough of sorrow, and what is gone is gone. We must try and be happy for others, now."

“Yes, dad, what is gone is gone, except my mother’s spirit. She is with me always.”

“I do not doubt it Loran. But come, let us go to breakfast, for it is nearly half-past eight.”

Rosemond met them when they entered the dining-room. She looked like a queen in her gown of old rose rich with deep lace, & Loran could not refrain from telling her so, and complimenting her on her splendid appearance that morning, which was of all mornings, the fairest to him.

“Rosemond, you are very beautiful!”

“Thank you, Loran,” she replied as they took their places at the table.

The dainty meal was quietly

passed, and when it was over, the three went into the garden where Rosemond gathered a large bouquet of white asters that she had been protecting from the frost.

“Loran, when you go up to Grandma’s, I wish you would take these along with you. I told her I would send them up for the table and if she puts them in the cellar they will be splendid this evening.”

“All right Rosemond.”

The noon hour arrived and Meadis and Loran were married at the pretty vine-clad home of Father Rodney. It was a quiet wedding with no one there but John Martin and Rosemond and Grandma.

But in the evening, oh, what

a crowd had gathered at the house of the "singing-bottle" on the hill. All the mill hands were there to serenade them, & everyone in the village had drifted there until the throng looked for all the world like bees around a hive. They hammered on tin pans and saws and everything they could get hold of to make a regular Bedlam.

After the turmoil had passed when Loran had appeared at the door with his bride and thanked them, John Martin appeared. He was a little pale perhaps, and his voice was husky, but he spoke loudly—John Martin was a man who feared no one.

"Friends, one moment, please. I wish to speak to you. I am glad to see you here this even-

ing for two reasons. One is because it shows your friendship and esteem for Meadis & Loran, and the other is to tell you who Loran is. There has been rumor here at the Corners that he came from the Orphans' Home. This is not true. Loran is my own boy! Listen. Twenty five year ago, I was secretly married to Rosa Levering of Gilford. I say secretly, because my folks were bitter toward the French people and all whom were of the Roman Catholic faith. But I loved, or thought I did, and in my boyish fancy I married her unknown to my parents. I have always supported my son, long before I took him into my care, which I did on the death of his mother, and I continued to

support him until he was able to support himself. His mother died soon after my parents, and this enabled me to bring him home, and you know the rest."

As John Martin was about to withdraw, John Smith appeared at his side.

"Friends, I too, have a word to say. It has been a great question here at the Corners as who this stranger, John Smith was. Well I will relieve your minds. Look!" He tore the disguise from his face.

"George Castle!" exclaimed Oakley Esden who was in the foreground of the crowd and near the steps.

"Yes, Oakley Esden. You are a mighty shrewd lawyer, I admit, and you boasted you

would find out who I was, but you didn't succeed until I chose to tell you, did you?

"Friends, I am a stranger to the most of you, but here and there, I see a familiar face who seems to remember me, and it seems good, too, for I used to live hear at the Corners with my foster parents, Frank Greenfield and his wife at the old brick house on Main street. John Martin and I have been chums ever since we were boys. Frank Greenfield and his wife adopted me, having taken me from the Orphans' Home when I was a small child, so you see I do not remember my own parents. All I have in the world to really love and care for me, are John Martin and Grandma

Bartlett. Here Grandma, come into the doorway and show yourself to the crowd. Now don't be bashful, come along." Everybody cheered as Grandma came out. "That's good! Friends, Grandma has been a mother & grandmother to the whole town. Now let's give her three more good cheers, altogether—now!" The air was filled with a volley of merry voices in response to his desire. When there was a lull, he spoke. "Now there is one more I want you to welcome here at the Corners. John Martin's wife, who was Rosemond Merritt of Pennsylvania. Come, Rosemond, everything must be done up square this evening. Everyone must know who's who." Rosemond came

and stood by the side of her husband. Once more the crowd cheered until the whole place rang with mirth and merriment and honest joy.

After awhile, the crowd was invited into the house where ice cream and cake were served and everyone had a fine time and went home wishing them all a happy and prosperous life.

When they were all gone and Grandma and George Castle, Meadis and Loran, John Martin and Rosemond had gathered into the little sitting-room to enjoy a moment among themselves, Grandma said smiling:

“My dears, everythin’ was done splendidly and just as I would have wished. George, I am proud of you, and John my

boy, I am proud of you, too. Rosemond, you have missed nothin' by waitin' all these years. All things come to those who wait."

"Yes, Grandma," said Rosemond smiling.

"We all have our crosses to bear," said Grandma, "but when we bear them cheerfully, the weight is not quite so heavy. It is when we rebel that its weight is the heaviest."

Meadis and Loran were sitting on the old hair-cloth couch and George Castle went over and sat between them.

"Meadis and Loran, I love you both, and from this day, I hope you will call me Uncle George. Loran used to say 'Uncle John,' and somehow, it sent a thrill of

joy to my soul. May I not have the same title, Loran?"

"Yes," replied Loran.

"And Meadis—"

"Yes."

"Good! Now I am going to start you both out in life with a thousand dollars each," he said taking a check-book from his pocket and making out two checks to the amount, and handing one to each.

"George, this is mighty good of you," said John Martin, "and I—"

"Not a word, John, not a word. I know your heart, old chum. The years have been many that we have been walking apart, but thank God we are together once more," replied George Castle as he arose and

went over to where John stood leaning on the mantle.

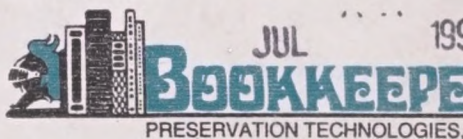
“Yes, George it is good,” added John Martin as he took the proffered hand and crushed it warmly in his own.

“John, while the folks are enjoying themselves let us go into the garden and have a smoke.”

“All right.”

Grandma watched them go out with the tears of joy in her eyes.

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